

CAREER CRESCENDO: A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON
THE DEVELOPMENTAL CAPACITY OF
PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

by

Ryan Hugh Sharp

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of **Ryan Hugh Sharp**
has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u>Glenn E. Richardson</u>	, Chair	<u>5/25/17</u> Date Approved
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<u>Nick Galli</u>	, Member	<u>6/2/17</u> Date Approved
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<u>Julia Franklin</u>	, Member	<u>5/25/17</u> Date Approved
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<u>Patricia Henrie-Barrus</u>	, Member	<u>5/25/17</u> Date Approved
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<u>Jeffrey Thompson</u>	, Member	<u>5/25/17</u> Date Approved
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and by **A. Mark Williams**, Chair/Dean of

the Department/College/School of **Health Promotion and Education**

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Research surrounding psychological capital (PsyCap) continues to expand and develop as scholars and organizational leaders look to the strengths of positive psychology and integrate them into the workplace. While previous research has underscored connections between PsyCap and various organizational outcomes, there remains little research on its actual development. This study used a mixed-methods design to determine the efficacy of 6-week worksite intervention designed to improve the PsyCap of its participants. There were 49 individuals who participated in the first phase of this study ($n=32$ assigned to the treatment group and $n=17$ to the control group) and, from that group, 13 were selected to participate in a postintervention interview. Using a pretest/posttest experimental design, the study showed that the intervention was efficacious in helping employees to develop greater PsyCap. It further provided rich qualitative insight into the perspective of individuals with high PsyCap and how it was successfully developed.

This dissertation is presented in a three-article format. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are intended for publication in organizational health literature. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the dissertation and an overview of the study performed. Chapter 2 is a review article which analyzes the construct of PsyCap and demonstrates the precedence for this concept in organizational behavior. It also makes the argument that there is a timely window to move this research and discussion into the field of health promotion in

an effort to help employees develop PsyCap and to facilitate a more productive workforce.

Chapters 3 and 4 are companion articles which provide the findings from this mixed methods study evaluating a work-site intervention in determining its efficacy on influencing employee's psychological capital. It also explored PsyCap from a qualitative perspective in an effort to provide insights learned from individuals with high PsyCap as well as a better understanding of its development.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, recognizes several limitations, and offers suggestions and direction for future research in the development of PsyCap and the role of health education programs in developing work-site interventions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Psychological stress has become a heavily researched topic (Cheung, So-kum, & Tang, 2011; Conger et al., 2002; Ennis, Hobfoll, & Schroder, 2000; Karimi, & Alipour, 2011; Liu, Chang, Fu, Wang, & Wang, 2012; Segerstrom & O'Connor, 2012). Job stress is gaining traction and health education scholars are drawing from the field of organizational behavior to help address this growing concern. While scholars and managers examine economic capital, human capital, and even social capital to gain a competitive edge, the concept of psychological capital has been positively correlated with job performance and negatively related to job stress (Abas & Raja, 2015). This dissertation shows that psychological capital (PsyCap) can be developed through a worksite intervention based on the principles of positive organizational behavior and provides a fresh approach to addressing job stress.

Studies suggest that stress not only influences an individual's health directly, but it can also affect it indirectly by changing their current health habits. Scholars have "explored its links with many of the leading causes of death in the world such as ischemic heart disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS, diabetes mellitus, etc." (Segerstrom & O'Connor, 2012, p. 128). Furthermore, many of the emotional health challenges of contemporary society are rooted in stress (Kalia, 2002). In many ways, stress can be viewed as a negative

gateway to a multitude of other health concerns. Indeed, as researchers peel back the layers of many of the current health concerns, they often discover that stress is a major underlying factor (Kalia, 2002).

To better understand stress, scholars have analyzed its intricacies and looked at its effect in a variety of contexts. They have looked at the effects of student stress, economic stress, job stress, familial stress, and others (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Conger, 2002; Ennis, Hobfoll, & Schroder, 2000). This study looked specifically at job stress and utilized a worksite intervention which was developed to decrease stress by increasing PsyCap. In studying job stress, it is helpful to note that scholars sometimes use different terminology in their research. For example, some talk about “work stress” while others discuss “job stress,” “organizational stress,” or “vocational stress.” Regardless of how it is being labeled, it is clear that stress in the workplace is becoming an important concern to address. The World Health Organization recently declared “occupational stress to be a worldwide epidemic” (Avey et al., 2009, p. 677).

Workplace stress is certainly a growing concern as the American Institute of Stress found that 75% to 90% of all doctor visits are now stress-related (Kalia, 2002). Furthermore, reports have shown that 1 in 4 American workers suffers a mental health problem rooted in stress (Kalia, 2002). Not only does stress have a direct link to anxiety and other mental/emotional health issues, it also has an impact on one’s physical health behavior. For example, work stress has been found to impact health behaviors such as drinking, smoking, exercise, and healthy eating.

Some of the greatest stressors in the workplace are heavy workloads, uncertain job expectations, and long hours (Bethune & Panlener, 2007). The most significant

stressors studied are those brought on by the death or debilitating illness of a family member or loved one. The unfortunate reality of these situations is that while the surviving family members wish all of their attention could be devoted to paying tribute to those who have passed (or caring for the sick), much of their anxiety is tied to their concerns regarding their employment and their financial situation.

From an organizational standpoint, there are many economic implications of work related stress. Studies have shown that up to 20% of payroll often goes directly to stress related issues (Avey et al., 2009). Additionally, it is estimated that \$150 billion dollars of revenue is lost to stress annually in absenteeism, poor decision-making, stress-related mental illness, and substance abuse (Kalia, 2002). These statistics look solely at the economic numbers and do not even approach the productivity advantages that come from an engaged workforce (Bakker, 2011). In contrast, scholars have shown that employees who are satisfied and find fulfillment in their work are more productive, absent less, report having less job stress, and demonstrate greater organizational loyalty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Culbertson & Fullagar, 2010; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Perrin, 1998).

Positive Organizational Behavior

One promising area for understanding and responding to job stress is the emerging field of Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) and the research of Dr. Fred Luthans and his colleagues. POB is gaining momentum and attracting the interest of scholars worldwide (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007; Wright, 2003). This propitious field stands on the

shoulders of the positive psychology movement (Lazarus, 2003), carrying with it Dr. Martin Seligman's invitation to accentuate positive qualities and focus on what actions and attributes produce positively minded individuals, families, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology argues that "what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). POB extends this argument to the workplace, studying among other things how various organizations and organizational leaders are able to create a positive environment leading to greater employee satisfaction productivity (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Gardner, Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). POB has as its primary interest the study of "positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59).

While some critics of positive psychology have asserted that it is nothing but a rehashing of some old school self-help books on the acclaimed power of a positive mental attitude (Miller, 2008), POB scholars have developed stringent criteria for inclusion in this discipline (Luthans, 2002b; Luthans & Avolio, 2009; Luthans & Youseff, 2007). Besides positivity, there are three requirements for a psychological resource capacity to fit within the defined POB framework. The following criteria illustrate the distinguishing characteristics of POB compared to positive psychology and even popular self-help books: "1. Must be based on theory, research, and valid measurement; 2. Must be 'state-like' (as opposed to more fixed 'trait-like') and thus be open to development; 3. Must have performance impact" (Luthans & Avolio, 2009, p.

299). These guidelines ensure that there is an appropriate measure of rigor, data, and peer review in order to validate any findings that come from a study. Furthermore, rather than focusing on a trait in which one has very little control, these criteria ensure that the constructs chosen can be measured, validated, and quantitatively generalized.

It is within this framework, and with the “state-like” definitional requirement of POB, that Luthans developed the concept of Psychological Capital (or PsyCap). PsyCap represents the collective make-up of four measurable constructs: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Youseff & Luthans, 2007). These four constructs were selected because they best meet the inclusion criteria of being substantiated by valid research measures, being state-like, and demonstrating performance impact (Avey et al., 2008).

Psychological Capital

Over the past decade, research surrounding psychological capital has grown exponentially. Görgens-Ekermans (2013) reported that PsyCap is being studied in China, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Africa, and most recently in parts of Australia (Dawkins, Martin, Scott, & Sanderson, 2015). PsyCap has been positively connected to employee’s attitudes, employee behavior, employee satisfaction and fulfillment, job performance/productivity, safety, commitment to organizational missions, well-being, organizational identity and citizenship, perceived supervisor support, work happiness, and a decreased level of job stress (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre 2011; Cheung et al., 2011; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avey,

Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010; Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Youseff & Luthans, 2007).

While so much attention has been dedicated to understanding this construct and its relational outcomes from a quantitative perspective, there remain two significant gaps in the literature: 1. PsyCap scholars have suggested a clear need for qualitative data to provide greater depth, richness, and understanding of the construct (Oruc & Kutanis, 2015) and 2. There has been little done to show how to actually develop greater PsyCap. Consequently, this study evaluated a worksite intervention in determining its efficacy on influencing employees' PsyCap. It further explored PsyCap from a qualitative perspective in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of what it is, what it looks like in an organization, and how it has successfully been developed.

Study Design

I used a mixed-methods design. This design was chosen because it maximizes the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while minimizing each of their weaknesses (Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The specific mixed-methods design implemented was an exploratory design using the participant selection model. An exploratory design is a two-phase, sequential approach that begins with a quantitative analysis and then draws upon those data to determine which participants were asked to participate in a follow-up study.

The study was guided by a postpositivism paradigm that “has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, an emphasis on empirical data collection, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on apriority theories” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20).

Ontologically, the foundational tenets of this paradigm are that “there is an *external* reality that can be (probabilistically) apprehendable. That is, a single reality exists and there is a real world externally out there independent of our interest in or knowledge of that world” (Smith, Sparkes, & Phoenix, 2012, p. 7). Research informed by this paradigm typically tries to formulate rules in an attempt to predict and influence as much as possible (Smith et al., 2012). A postpositivism paradigm was selected because the focus of the present study is to better understand individuals with high levels of PsyCap in an effort to learn how to help others to improve and develop greater PsyCap themselves.

While the number of proposed theoretical traditions in qualitative research ranges anywhere from 5 to 45 (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Tesch, 1990), Merriam and Tisdell (2016) focus their work on six of the more commonly used designs (basic, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative theory, and case studies). The basic design is the most popular approach to qualitative research. The basic design was chosen for this study because its overall purpose is to better “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

The basic design was useful in understanding how the employees studied interpreted their experiences at work and what meaning they attributed to these experiences. As Galli and Reel observed, “In contrast to phenomenology or grounded theory designs, in which researchers’ interpretations go beyond mere descriptions of participants’ experiences, basic descriptive designs are adopted when the goal is simply an increased understanding of a phenomenon” (2012). Such is the primary objective of this study.

Sample Selection

The population for this study included full-time educators in the state of Utah. Specifically, the study drew from educators in one geographical area that is administered by a larger, international organization. This site was chosen because the local supervisor expressed an interest in helping employees find greater work fulfillment and productivity, with particular interest in inoculating against a mid-career slump.

An invitation to participate in a 6-week training was sent to 180 full-time employees from the supervisor 4 weeks prior to the 1st week of the training. To both incentivize participation and to make the training more meaningful, participants were offered continuing education credit which could be applied toward their annual compensation package upon completion. Those who agreed to participate were contacted to ensure that they understood they would need to commit to attending all six training sessions and also to completing the take home assignments. From the 180 recipients of the email, 49 individuals agreed to participate either as a part of the treatment group or as a member of the comparison group (a 27% response rate). Of those participants, 39 had agreed to complete the intervention as part of the treatment group while 10 were willing to represent the comparison group. However, seven individuals who had initially agreed to participate in the intervention as a member of the treatment group decided to move to the comparison group prior to the first training. There was no further attrition over the duration of the intervention. In summary, of the 49 total participants, 32 were part of the treatment group with 17 engaged as part of the comparison group. The average age of the participants was 42.5 years and the average tenure of service was 15.7 years. The intervention was implemented June-July 2016, and follow-up interviews were conducted

from September-October 2016.

Data Collection

All 49 participants were invited to complete a pretest survey (the PCQ-24) the week prior to the first day of training and then given the same survey as a posttest the week following the last training session. After analyzing the quantitative data to determine the efficacy of the intervention, the 13 employees who demonstrated the highest levels of PsyCap were invited to participate in phase 2 of the study. The selection criteria required that they 1) Participated as part of the treatment group so as to be familiar with the concepts and language of psychological capital and 2) Scored at least 5.3 on the overall PCQ-24 posttest. The individuals who scored the highest were selected because, in line with the philosophy of POB, they would add to the understanding of “positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59).

The interview guide drew from the PCQ-24 and had questions from each of the four constructs of PsyCap: 1) Self- efficacy, 2) Hope, 3) Resilience, and 4) Optimism. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phase 1

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The data were first screened to look for any missing

variables or outliers. Because there was no compelling reason to adjust the p -value, significance was set at .05. Next, the pretest data were assessed using an independent t -test comparing the treatment group and comparison group.

To assess within group data, a one-way repeated measure ANOVA with a within groups factor of time (assessing results from pre- and posttests) was conducted. The ANOVA helped to determine outcomes within both the treatment group and comparison group.

Next, a between groups analysis was performed. Independent t -tests were used to analyze the efficacy of the intervention as data were compared from the comparison group and from the treatment group. Change scores were calculated to control for baseline values which was useful in comparing the improvement rate between the two groups.

Phase 2

The second phase of the study was the qualitative analysis of the 13 individuals who scored highest on the PCQ-24 (5.3 and above). Interviews were facilitated by the author and the analysis was also led by the author. After the interviews were transcribed, they were checked for accuracy and then sent out to each respective participant as part of the member checking process. Identities were then removed and the data were entered into NVivo (QSR International, 2012).

A thematic analysis approach was chosen to code and analyze the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). In generating the initial codes and analyzing the data there were two different approaches to consider: 1) Inductive category development and 2) Deductive

category development (Mayring, 2000). While an inductive approach involves “detailed readings of raw data in order to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by a researcher” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238), a deductive approach is used when the researcher begins with a theoretical framework already in mind. In this way, deductive analysis is more of a top-down type approach. The overall purpose of general coding analysis involves “the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place” (Bernard, 2006, p. 452; Cavanagh, 1997; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002; Mayring, 2000). Even though the framework of PsyCap drove the interview questions in this study, an inductive approach was employed in an effort to allow the themes to arise organically from the data.

Trustworthiness

In order for research to have an effect, it needs to be valid, reliable, and demonstrate appropriate rigor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell explained that “regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). Unlike quantitative research, validity, reliability, and credibility in qualitative research are primarily measures on its being trustworthy.

Smith suggested that one way of determining trustworthy claims is to ensure the proper use of methods (Smith, 1993). In the present study participants were selected

using the data from the quantitative portion of the study. While this inclusive approach precludes the use of control sampling for diversity in experience, position, gender, race, etc., it was effective in helping to answer the specific research questions of this study. The second way trustworthiness was addressed came from using a detailed interview guide. While freedom was maintained to allow the interviewee's response to influence the direction the interview took, the interview guide assisted in maintaining the integrity of the purpose and intent of the study (Kvale, 2007).

Once the interviews were completed, member checking was used to ensure that the thoughts and experiences of each participant were accurately represented (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Participants chose whether to receive an email with a copy of the transcript or to be provided with a hard copy to review. They were asked to check for discrepancies and invited to make any adjustments to the transcript that they saw appropriate. It has been suggested that member checking "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed" (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 126–127).

Another way of addressing threats to trustworthiness was in the process of triangulation. A mixed-methods study inherently triangulates the data collection process. Triangulation also took place across participants as data were analyzed throughout the overall study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, peer examination was used to address the potential of any biases which may have resulted from only one person's analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, the entire procedure of gathering, analyzing,

and interpreting the data was clearly detailed. The approach for data coding was specifically outlined and the outline was followed in analyzing and interpreting the data.

Dissertation

This dissertation follows the three-article format. The first article, presented in Chapter 2, is a review article to be submitted to the *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*. It reviews the construct of PsyCap and demonstrates the precedence for this concept in organizational behavior. It makes the argument that there is a timely window to move the research and discussion into the field of health promotion in an effort to increase PsyCap and help facilitate a healthier and more productive workforce. The second article, presented in Chapter 3, describes the quantitative findings from a work-site intervention and will be submitted to the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. The third article, presented in Chapter 4, describes the findings from a qualitative study analyzed individuals with high PsyCap and will be submitted to the *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*. Chapter 5 provides a detailed summary and conclusion of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

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CHAPTER 2

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL: A PROVEN SOLUTION TO THE GROWING CHALLENGES OF WORKPLACE HEALTH

Abstract

Psychological stress has piqued the interest of health educators and workplace supervisors across the world. Studies suggest that stress not only influences individual health directly, but it can also affect it indirectly by changing an individual's current health habits. Among the various types of stress being studied, job stress is gaining traction and health education scholars are drawing from the field of organizational behavior to help address this growing concern. While scholars and managers look at economic capital, human capital, and even social capital to gain a competitive edge, psychological capital has been found to be positively correlated to high productivity and low job stress. This review article suggests that health educators draw upon already existing management research in order to develop programs designed to address job stress by increasing employee psychological capital.

Introduction

On September 11, 1999, Dr. Martin Seligman met with a large group of scholars in Lincoln, Nebraska, for what would become an historic academic summit. The purpose: “To create a scientific monument . . . that would bring the light of science to bear on the question of what are the best things in life? How can we achieve these things? How can we help our fellow human beings to achieve them” (Seligman, 1999). It is interesting to note that these ambitions, mighty and audacious as they were, stemmed from an incident in a simple rose garden.

Two years prior to this academic summit, Dr. Seligman had been weeding his rose garden with his 5-year-old daughter Nikki. While Seligman labored in the garden, Nikki ran around throwing the weeds in the air and dancing throughout the yard. Growing impatient, he yelled at her, only to have her sadly walk away, gather herself, and then resolutely march right back up to him. As she stormed back she said, “Daddy, I want to talk to you.” She proceeded to tell him that before her fifth birthday she was a whiner. She asked him to remember how she had whined and whined from the time she was three. But she now had a new resolve. On her fifth birthday, she said, “I decided I wasn’t going to whine anymore. And that was the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” She then boldly, yet lovingly, told her father, “And if I can stop whining, you can stop being so grumpy” (Seligman, 1999).

Seligman explained how his experience that day was a personal epiphany. He described how the former school of thought in psychology postulated that raising children was about repairing weaknesses by finding what was wrong and correcting it. He realized that his 5-year-old daughter had just corrected her behavior of her own volition. What,

then, was the role of a parent? In Seligman's own words, "Raising Nikki would be about taking the strength that she had just shown, naming it, nurturing it, reinforcing it, helping her to lead her life around it and let it buffer against the weaknesses and the vicissitudes" (Seligman, 1999). It was in the rich soil of this experience that the academic seed of positive psychology was planted. Following 2 years of cultivating, the 1999 academic summit provided the nourishment that this seed needed in order to take root, mature, and then blossom into a respected academic field (Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2014). Indeed, Seligman's professional mission became to accentuate positive qualities and focus on what actions and attributes produce positively minded individuals, families, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Foundations of Positive Organizational Behavior

One of the scholars who attended that first Positive Psychology summit was Dr. Fred Luthans. Luthans was a pioneer in the field of Organizational Behavior and had dedicated more than 30 years to this discipline. Sitting in that meeting in Lincoln Nebraska, Luthans felt a "spark" come to his mind as he determined that this concept is exactly what the field of management needed. This experience became the genesis for what he would appropriately call Positive Organizational Behavior (POB).

POB is gaining momentum and attracting the interest of scholars worldwide (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007; Wright, 2003). This promising discipline stands on the shoulders of the positive psychology movement (Lazarus, 2003) which argues that "what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4).

POB extends this argument to the workplace studying, among other things, how various organizations and organizational leaders are able to create a positive environment leading to greater employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Gardner, Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Luthans suggested the primary focus of POB should be the study of “positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59).

While some critics of positive psychology have asserted that it is nothing but a rehashing of some old school self-help books on the acclaimed power of a positive mental attitude (Miller, 2008), POB scholars have developed stringent criteria for inclusion in this discipline (Luthans, 2002b; Luthans & Avolio, 2009; Luthans & Youseff, 2007). Besides positivity, there are three requirements for a psychological resource capacity to fit within the defined POB framework: “1. Must be based on theory, research, and valid measurement; 2. Must be ‘state-like’ (as opposed to more fixed ‘trait-like’) and thus be open to development; 3. Must have performance impact” (Luthans & Avolio, 2009, p. 299). These guidelines ensure that there is an appropriate measure of rigor, data, and peer review in order to validate any findings that come from a study. Furthermore, rather than focusing on a trait in which one has very little control, these criteria ensure that the constructs chosen can be measured, validated, and quantitatively generalized.

The first criterion (which requires a foundation of theory, research and valid measurement) was selected to ensure that there was a marked distinction between POB

research and popular culture's self-help and personal development literature. In other words, POB sought to provide scientific data to substantiate its claims in order to ensure that it became a reputable academic discipline. Thus, as in all academic research, data driven analysis drives the depth, the direction, and the dependability of this discipline.

The second criterion (the requirement that it be state-like) merits further analysis. From a POB paradigm, the primary division between traits and states is the appropriate fluidity of the psychological capacity. While a "trait-like" capacity is relatively stable, "state-like" qualities are able to be acquired, developed, and refined (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008). Some have argued that this distinction between traits and states is fruitless (Allen & Potkay, 1981). However, the ability to influence and change one's state-like capabilities ensures that leaders can have a positive influence on the psychosocial capacity of their organizations through worksite interventions, on the job trainings, and self-development opportunities (Luthans, 2002b).

Psychological Capital

It is within this framework, and with the "state-like" definitional requirement of POB, that Luthans developed the concept of Psychological Capital (PsyCap). PsyCap represents the collective make-up of four measurable constructs: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Ilies et al., 2005; Luthans & Yousseff; 2007; Rego et al., 2012; Yousseff & Luthans, 2007). These four constructs were selected because they best meet the inclusion criteria of being substantiated by valid research measures, being state-like, and demonstrating performance impact (Avey et al., 2008).

The first of the four core capacities, self-efficacy, has been defined as “one’s conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajovic & Luthans, 1998). Efficacy has been called the “best fit” in meeting the definitional criteria of PsyCap (Luthans, 2002a) and has the most established and substantiated research support (Bandura, 1997; Maurer & Pierce, 1998; Parker, 1998).

At the heart of the second core capacity, hope, is what some scholars have called “willpower” and “waypower.” Youseff and Luthans suggest that “hope’s agency or ‘willpower’ component provides the determination to achieve goals, whereas its pathways or ‘waypower’ component promotes the creation of alternative paths to replace those that may have been blocked in the process of pursuing those goals” (2007, p. 778). Thus, hope is focused on an individual’s efforts towards attaining their personal goals and then making a conscious effort to produce a pathway in order to achieve those goals (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991; Youseff & Luthans, 2007). Furthermore, “hope has been shown to be adaptable and to relate to performance in various domains, including the workplace” (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Luthans, Van Wyk, & Walumbwa, 2004; Youseff & Luthans, 2007).

Optimism, the third core capacity, focuses on “making an internal, relatively stable, and global attribution regarding positive events such as goal achievement, and an external, relatively unstable, and specific cause for negative events like a failed attempt at reaching a goal” (Luthans et al., 2008). Research has shown that optimism as a psychological capacity is related to performance, satisfaction, and happiness (Luthans et

al., 2008; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Person, 2005; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

The final construct is resilience. Resilience “refers to a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002). While some scholars have focused on resilience as simply being the ability to “bounce back” from a particular challenge (Luthans, 2002a; Masten & Reed, 2002), Richardson (2002) developed a model which suggests that individuals can improve their resiliency in successive progression through a disruption and reintegration process. Not only does Richardson (2002) suggest that this process results in “growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities” (p. 310), he also postulates that these disruptive and adversarial experiences can lead to an individual’s personal development and growth (Richardson, 2002).

Over the past decade, research surrounding PsyCap has grown exponentially. Görgens-Ekermans and Herbert (2013) find that it has been studied in China, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Africa, and scholars have since studied it in parts of Australia (Dawkins, Martin, Scott, & Sanderson, 2015). Work site interventions focused on developing and strengthening PsyCap can assist in generating greater employee satisfaction and fulfillment and have already been positively connected to the following desirable outcomes: employees’ attitudes, employee behavior, job performance/productivity, safety, commitment to organizational missions, well-being, organizational identity and citizenship, perceived supervisor support, work happiness, and a decreased level of job stress (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre 2011; Cheung et al., 2011; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010; Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Yousseff

& Luthans, 2007).

Rising Concern of Organizational Stress

Psychological stress has proven to be a major health concern which has caught the attention of practitioners and academicians alike. Studies suggest that stress not only influences an individual's health directly, but it can also affect it indirectly by changing their current health habits. Scholars have "explored its links with many of the leading causes of death in the world such as ischemic heart disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS, diabetes mellitus, etc." (Segerstrom & O'Connor, 2012). Furthermore, many of the emotional health challenges of contemporary society are rooted in stress (Kalia, 2002). In many ways, stress can be viewed as a negative gateway to a multitude of other health concerns. Indeed, as researchers peel back the layers of many of the current health concerns, they often discover that stress is a major underlying factor (Kalia, 2002).

To better understand stress, scholars have analyzed its intricacies and looked at its effect in a variety of contexts. They have looked at the effects of student stress, economic stress, job stress, familial stress and others (Avey & Jens, 2009; Conger et al., 2002; Ennis, Hobfoll, & Schroder, 2000). Whether being labeled as "work stress," "job stress," "organizational stress," or "vocational stress," it is clear that stress in the workplace is becoming an important concern to address. Indeed, the World Health Organization recently declared occupational stress to be a worldwide epidemic (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009).

Some of the greatest stressors in the workplace are heavy workloads, uncertain job expectations, and long hours (Bethune & Panlener, 2007). Workplace stress is a

growing concern as the American Institute of Stress found that 75% to 90% of all doctor visits are stress-related (Kalia, 2002). Furthermore, reports have shown that 1 in 4 American workers suffers a mental health problem rooted in stress (Kalia, 2002). Not only does stress have a direct link to anxiety and other mental/emotional health issues, it also has an impact on one's physical health behavior. For example, work stress has been found to impact health behaviors such as drinking, smoking, exercise, and healthy eating.

From an organizational standpoint, there are important economic implications of work related stress. Studies have shown that 20% of payroll often goes directly to stress related issues (Avey et al., 2009). Additionally, it is estimated that \$150 billion of revenue is lost to stress annually in absenteeism, poor decision-making, stress-related mental illness, and substance abuse (Kalia, 2002). These statistics are purely related to hard, bottom-line economic numbers and do not even consider the productivity advantages that come from an engaged workforce (Bakker, 2011). In contrast to organizational stress, scholars have shown that employees who are satisfied and find fulfillment in their work are more productive, absent less, reported having less job stress, and demonstrated greater organizational loyalty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Culbertson & Fullagar, 2010; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Perrin, 1998).

Workplace Interventions

Health Promotion is primarily interested in “helping people discover the synergies between their core passions and optimal health, enhancing their motivation to strive for optimal health, and supporting them in changing their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health” (O’ Donnell, 2009, p. iv). One of the ways in which this goal is

accomplished is through worksite interventions which provide “learning experiences that enhance awareness, increase motivation, and build skills and, most important, through the creation of opportunities that open access to environments that make positive health practices the easiest choice”(O’ Donnell, 2009, p. iv).

Why the Workplace

One of the simplest reasons for conducting an intervention in the workplace is simply access. Participating organizations who recognize the value of an intervention make available a relatively large population group to affect. Another important reason why the worksite is an effective place for a health intervention is that an occupation can be an integral part of an individual’s physical and mental health and can also play a role in someone’s identity and social status (Odeen et al., 2013). Because many employees spend about a third of their time at work, their job often becomes the crucible in which they find purpose and meaning. It is often in this professional setting where individuals set and achieve the goals which help drive their personal development (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Meyers, 2007; Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010).

Other practical reasons for using a worksite for a health interventions relate to the added motivation of employers, with more than 60% of Americans getting their health insurance coverage through their employment (Blumenthal, 2006). With health care costs rising employers are become more motivated to invest in the health of their employees (Kalia, 2002). Studies have found that when workplace health improves, employee engagement and productivity improve as well (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009).

Role of Health Promotion

Health educators and scholars have significant experience developing, implementing, and analyzing programs designed to address the growing health concerns previously mentioned. The following represents a typical process. Scores of studies on worksite interventions have been developed, analyzed, and published (Helmhout, Diebal, Van der Kaaden, Harts, Beutler, & Zimmermann, 2015; Miyachi et al., 2015; Saw, Kruger-Jakins, Endries, & Parker, 2016; Thorstensson, Roos, Peterson, & Ekdahl, 2005)

A review of health promotion interventions designed to address work related health concerns showed that work place health interventions are far more effective when conducted in larger groups rather than at an individual level (Bagnall, Jones, Akter, & Woodall, 2016). The intervention size should be large enough to influence a broad population of the organization but small enough to allow for a more intimate and practical exploration of these concepts. These interventions have demonstrated a synergy that can be created when training in a larger group setting rather than a one on one approach and can thus lead to greater improvement and development (Bagnall et al., 2016). Additionally, studies have shown that positive outcomes at one level will often spill over and influence change at another system level (Cooley, Pedersen, & Mainsbridge, 2014).

Figure 2.1 provides an example of a commonly used approach health educators use in developing, implementing, and then evaluating the efficacy of a workplace intervention.

A commonly used approach health educators use in developing, implementing, and then evaluating the efficacy of a workplace intervention is: Step #1: Needs

assessment, Step #2: Matrices, Step #3: Theory/Based methods and tactical strategies, Step #4: Program, Step #5: Adoption and implementation plan, Step #6: Evaluation plan (van Bruinessen et al., 2014). Approaches such as these ensure that there is an appropriate amount of rigor and thoroughness to allow the intervention to be effective in its desired impact while also providing enough context to allow for greater generalizability, thus broadening the scope of impact. In this way health educators have helped individuals to engage in the learning experiences that have enhanced awareness, increased motivation, and built the skills necessary to enable individuals and organizations to gain “open access to environments that make positive health practices the easiest choice”(O’ Donnell, 2009, p. iv).

Implications

The research surrounding PsyCap is both extensive and compelling. In addition to finding high PsyCap to be positively associated with a multitudinous array of positive outcomes (Avey et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2011), scholars indicate that these individuals “are better equipped to deal with the stressors in a constantly changing workplace environment, as they are open to new experiences, are flexible to changing demands, and show more emotional stability when faced with adversity” (Avey et al., 2009, p. 683). Although many studies underscore these connections and outcomes in a persuasive manner, there remains little research on the actual development of PsyCap. This article makes the argument that health educators align their expertise with the already existing findings provided in the PsyCap literature, to develop worksite interventions designed to increase the PsyCap of employees and thus allow employees to access the

aforementioned outcomes. This effort would draw from the strengths of both disciplines in addressing the virtually universal desire to establish positive, healthy, productive, and engaged organizations (Liu, Chang, Fu, & Wang, 2012).

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CHAPTER 3

AN EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF A 6-WEEK WORKSITE INTERVENTION TO DETERMINE ITS EFFICACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Abstract

Research surrounding psychological capital (PsyCap) continues to expand and develop as scholars and organizational leaders look to the strengths of positive psychology and integrate them into the workplace. Although previous research underscores connections between PsyCap and various organizational outcomes, there remains little research on its actual development. The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of a 6-week worksite intervention in improving the PsyCap of its participants. The first phase of the study included 49 individuals ($n=32$ assigned to the treatment group and $n=17$ to the comparison group) and, from that group, 13 were selected to participate in a postintervention interview. Using a pretest/posttest experimental design, the study showed that the intervention was efficacious in helping employees to develop greater PsyCap.

Introduction

Positive organizational behavior (POB) is gaining momentum and attracting the interest of scholars worldwide (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Luthans, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007; Wright, 2003). This promising discipline stands on the shoulders of the positive psychology movement (Lazarus, 2003) which argues that “what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). POB extends this argument to the workplace studying, among other things, how various organizations and organizational leaders are able to create a positive environment leading to greater employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Gardner, Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). POB has as its primary interest the study of “positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59).

Although some critics of positive psychology have asserted that it is nothing but a rehashing of some old school self-help books on the acclaimed power of a positive mental attitude (Miller, 2008), POB scholars have developed stringent criteria for inclusion in this discipline (Luthans, 2002b; Luthans & Avolio, 2009; Luthans & Youseff, 2007). Besides positivity, there are three requirements for a psychological resource capacity to fit within the defined POB framework. The following criteria distinguish POB from the less academically rigid self-help genre: “1. Must be based on theory, research, and valid measurement; 2. Must be ‘state-like’ (as opposed to more fixed ‘trait-like’) and thus be open to development; 3. Must have performance impact”

(Luthans & Avolio, 2009, p. 299). These guidelines ensure that there is an appropriate measure of rigor, data, and peer review in order to validate any findings that come from a study. Furthermore, rather than focusing on a trait in which one has very little control, these criteria ensure that the constructs chosen can be measured, validated and are also quantitatively generalizable.

Against that backdrop, Luthans developed the concept of Psychological Capital (or PsyCap). PsyCap represents the collective make-up of four measurable constructs: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Luthans & Yousseff, 2007; Yousseff & Luthans, 2007). These four constructs were selected because they best meet the inclusion criteria of being substantiated by valid research measures, being state-like, and demonstrating performance impact (Avey et al., 2008).

The first of the four core capacities, self-efficacy, has been defined as “one’s conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajovic & Luthans, 1998). Efficacy has been called the “best fit” in meeting the definitional criteria of PsyCap (Luthans, 2002a) and has the most established and substantiating research support (Bandura, 1997; Maurer & Pierce, 1998; Parker, 1998).

At the heart of the second core capacity, hope, is what some scholars have called “willpower” and “waypower.” Yousseff and Luthans suggest that “hope’s agency or ‘willpower’ component provides the determination to achieve goals, whereas its pathways or ‘waypower’ component promotes the creation of alternative paths to replace

those that may have been blocked in the process of pursuing those goals” (Youseff & Luthans, 2007, p. 778). Thus, hope is focused on an individual’s efforts towards attaining their personal goals and then making a conscious effort to produce a pathway to achieve the goal (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991; Youseff & Luthans, 2007). Furthermore, “hope has been shown to be adaptable and to relate to performance in various domains, including the workplace” (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Luthans, Van Wyk, & Walumbwa, 2004; Youseff & Luthans, 2007).

Optimism, the third core capacity, focuses on “making an internal, relatively stable, and global attribution regarding positive events such as goal achievement, and an external, relatively unstable, and specific cause for negative events like a failed attempt at reaching a goal” (Luthans et al., 2008). Studies have shown that optimism as a psychological capacity is related to “performance, satisfaction, and happiness” (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li., 2005; Luthans et al., 2008; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Person, 2005; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Finally, resilience “refers to a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75). While some scholars have focused on resilience as simply being the ability to “bounce back” from a particular challenge (Luthans, 2002a; Masten & Reed, 2002), Richardson (2002) has developed a model which suggests that individuals improve their resiliency in successive progression through a disruption and reintegration process. Not only does Richardson suggest that this process results in “growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities” (Richardson, 2002, p. 310), he also postulates that these disruptive and adversarial experiences can lead to an

individual's personal development and growth (Richardson, 2002).

Over the past decade, research surrounding psychological capital has grown exponentially. PsyCap is being studied in China, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Africa, and is most recently also being studied in parts of Australia (Dawkins, Martin, Scott, & Sanderson, 2015; Görgens-Ekermans & Herbert, 2013). Scholars have shown that employees who are satisfied and find fulfillment in their work are more productive, absent less, reported having less job stress and demonstrated greater organizational loyalty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Culbertson & Fullagar, 2010; Karimi & Alipour, 2011; Perrin, 1998).

The focus of POB, and the foundation of PsyCap, is the ability to help individuals acquire, develop, and refine positive states and thus help them become more productive in their work and find greater satisfaction in doing so (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). The ability to influence and change one's state-like capabilities ensures that leaders can have a positive influence on the PsyCap of their organizations through work site interventions, on-the-job trainings, and personal or self-development opportunities (Luthans, 2002b). PsyCap has been positively connected to employee's attitudes, employee behavior, job performance/productivity, safety, commitment to organizational missions, well-being, organizational identity and citizenship, perceived supervisor support, authentic leadership, work happiness, and a decreased level of job stress (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre 2011; Cheung et al., 2011; Erkmen & Esen, 2012; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010; Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Consequently, worksite interventions focused on developing and strengthening

PsyCap can assist in generating greater employee satisfaction and fulfillment while accessing the aforementioned outcomes.

While so much attention has been dedicated to understanding PsyCap and its relationship with a multitudinous array of positive outcomes, there has been little done to show how to actually develop it. One study which attempted to address this gap used a short, 2-hour web based training (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008). Using a pretest, posttest comparison group quasi-experimental design, the study showed that the treatment group experienced an increase in their PsyCap while the randomly assigned comparison group did not. Although this relatively short web based intervention provides a positive shift of focus towards the developmental possibilities of PsyCap, the present study provides a detailed assessment of a 6-week, face to face intervention and demonstrates a significant improvement in PsyCap in those who participated in the training.

Methods

Study Design

This study was part of a larger mixed methods design aimed at determining the efficacy of a worksite intervention in improving the PsyCap of employees. This design was chosen because it maximizes the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while minimizing each of their weaknesses (Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The specific mixed methods design implemented was the explanatory design using the participant selection model. This is a two-phase, sequential approach which began with a quantitative analysis and then drew upon those data to

determine individuals who will be asked to participate in a follow-up study.

Setting and Participants

This study drew from full-time educators in northern Utah who are part of a large, global organization. The organization has developed a continuous improvement program which allows employees to design their own certification projects. These projects could be articles written, summaries of classes and seminars attended, syntheses from books and studies they have read, etc. Once they have completed a certain number of these projects, employees are awarded a certification credential. That credential then allows them to move into a higher compensation track.

The Area Director sent an email to 180 employees offering them credit for one certification project if they successfully completed this training. The email instructed the employees to respond if they had any interest in participating in the intervention. At the time of the intervention's inception, 49 participants agreed to participate either as a part of the treatment group or as a member of the comparison group (a 27% response rate). Of those participants, 39 agreed to complete the intervention as part of the treatment group while 10 were willing to represent the comparison group. However, seven individuals who had initially agreed to participate in the intervention decided to move to the comparison group prior to the first training. There was no further attrition over the duration of the intervention. In summary, of the 49 total participants, 32 were part of the treatment group with 17 engaged as part of the comparison group. The average age of the participants was 42.5 years and the average tenure of service was 15.7 years. The intervention was implemented June–July 2016, and follow-up interviews were conducted

from September-October 2016.

Measures

This study was analyzed using nominal level measures along with ordinal level measures. The nominal measures were age and tenure with the organization. The ordinal level measure was the PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ-24).

The PCQ-24 was developed by Fred Luthans and his research team at the University of Nebraska. This team scoured various instruments that had been used to measure each of the four core constructs of PsyCap (self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism). The four scales selected were based on the psychometric qualities of reliability, validity, and fairness. Additionally, for the items to be included they needed to demonstrate a strong relevance to the workforce and also be considered state-like (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). This panel of researchers selected six questions from each of the four standard measures. The wording was then adapted to apply more directly to the workplace. These 24 questions are assessed using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) (Luthans et al., 2007). The PCQ-24 produces an overall score for each of the four concepts individually and provides an overall PsyCap score at the end. Each of the four PCQ subscale scores is calculated by taking the mean (average) of all items in the scale. The overall PsyCap score is calculated by taking the mean of all items in the PCQ. It should be noted that some items are reverse scored.

In their analysis of the development of the instrument, Görgens-Ekermans and Herbert explained that “two criteria informed the development process. Firstly, all four

constructs were assigned an equal weight, to enable the selection of the six best items from every measure. Secondly, selected items were evaluated for face and content validity, being state-like and relevant to the workplace” (2013, p. 2). Luthans’ team also tested for internal consistency and subsequently ran a confirmatory factor analysis (for specific results see Luthans et al., 2007).

The instrument itself could be described as being “monocentered” in that it originated from a single western cultural background (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2001). However, the PCQ-24 drew questions from other previously validated instruments which were not developed in one specific culture. Furthermore, it has now been used in more than 85 studies in various cultures across the world (Dawkins, Martin, Scott, & Sanderson, 2015; Görgens-Ekermans & Herbert, 2013).

Study Procedures

The Institutional Review Board approved this study. Additionally, the proposal was approved by the organization’s Education Research Committee (ERC). All 49 participants (comparison and treatment groups) were sent the PCQ-24 a week prior to the intervention as a pretest. The survey was sent via email with a link that could be completed at the participants’ convenience anytime within the week. The intervention took place over a 6-week period of time with employees in the treatment group attending a 2-hour session every other week which included lecture, group discussions, visiting experts, and hands on learning activities. Following each training session an email was sent to the participants in the treatment group including a brief review of important concepts discussed with assignments and exercises to be completed prior to the next

session.

The program began with an overview of what would be expected of the participants over the 6-week course, an introduction to positive organizational behavior, and a focus on the idea of living a career in crescendo. Following this introductory portion, the construct of self-efficacy was explored (Bandura, 1994) using lecture, group discussion, and a hands on activity. Dr. Jeffrey Thompson then trained on a concept in organizational behavior of work as a calling and how to seek and experience deeply meaningful work (see Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

Session 2 focused on the constructs of hope and optimism. The research of Youseff and Luthans (2007), Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and the insightful contributions of other leading scholars on change (Heath & Heath, 2011; Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switler, 2011) were drawn upon and explored. Dr. Patricia Henrie-Barrus, a practicing therapist who specializes in positive psychology, then facilitated a training based on the science, principles, and constructs of positive psychology and some practical application of these concepts. Participants were invited to complete a series of exercises at home before the next session.

The third and final session reviewed many of the principles the participants had been learning about and practicing throughout the 6-week period and drew feedback and analysis from the group. Dr. Glenn Richardson, a leading expert on resilience and resiliency, walked the participants through what he calls “the resilient journey” and facilitated their participation in resiliency mapping (Richardson, 2002; Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990).

One week after the final session, all 49 participants were again sent the PCQ-24 to

be completed as a posttest. The survey was sent via email with a link that could be completed at the participants' convenience anytime over the course of that week.

Hypothesis

The primary hypotheses were that participation in the intervention would result in increased PsyCap scores and that there would be a statistically significant interaction effect comparing gain scores between the comparison group and treatment group.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an experimental mixed design looking at between-groups variance as well as within group variance. The between-groups factors were a comparison group and a treatment group and the within group factor was time (pre- and posttests). Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The data were first screened to look for any missing data or outliers. Because no missing data were found, Little's MCAR test was not necessary. With no compelling reason to adjust the p -value, significance was set at .05.

In testing for normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and the Shapiro-Wilk were employed. With significance set at .05 (Field, 2009), the Kolmogorov-Smirnov ($p=.003$) and the Shapiro-Wilk showed the data significantly deviated from a normal distribution (see Figure 3.1).

Furthermore, the data showed one positive outlier. To determine how the outlier affected the results and assumptions of the data, a one-way ANOVA was performed without including the outlier in the data. Even with the absence of the positive outlier, the

results remained significant [$F(1, 46) = 5.53, p = .02$]. Consequently, the outlier remained in the analysis.

In an effort to determine any potential correlations between age or years of service and PsyCap gain scores, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated. This showed no correlation between age and PsyCap gain scores [$r = .06, n = 49, p = .683$] nor was there any correlation between number of years employed and PsyCap gain scores [$r = .07, n = 49, p = .620$].

Results

The data were initially assessed by comparing mean pretest scores between the comparison group and treatment group. The comparison group ($M = 5.07$) scored higher than the treatment group ($M = 4.83$) on the pretest PsyCap scores. A t-test was performed analyzing pretest scores between the two groups and showed no significance in the difference $t(17,32) = 1.78, p = .09$. Mean differences were then compared looking at pretest and posttest scores for the comparison group and the treatment group independent of each other. Both tests showed significance in improvement from pre- to posttest with the treatment group outperforming the comparison group. The comparison group: Pretest ($M = 5.07, SD = .44$); posttest ($M = 5.24, SD = .37$), $t(16) = 3.25, p < .01$, Cohens $d = .42$. The treatment group: Pretest ($M = 4.83, SD = .47$); Posttest ($M = 5.247, SD = .393$), $t(31) = 5.84, p < .01$, Cohens $d = .97$.

Gain scores were calculated in order to examine differences in PsyCap scores between the comparison group and treatment group and also to control for individual baseline differences in pretest score. An independent t-test was then performed using gain

scores as the dependent variable. Because the results from the Lavene's test of Equality of Error Variance were greater than .05, equal variance was assumed, $F(1,47)=3.774$, $p=.058$. With equal variance assumed, the results of the t-test suggest that there was a statistically significant difference in gain scores between the two groups with individuals in the treatment group showing greater improvement than their counterparts in the comparison group, $t(17,32)=2.404$, $p=.02$.

The size of this effect ($d=.79$), as indexed by Cohens (1988) coefficient, was extremely close to the convention for a large effect size (.80) and well above the convention for a medium effect size (.50). This means that 79% of the treatment group's gain scores are above the mean of the comparison group. Finally, the common language effect size (McGraw & Wong, 1992) —also called the probability of superiority— percentage was 71% (Grissom & Kim, 2005). In other words, there is a 71% chance that a person randomly selected from the treatment group would have a higher gain score than a participant selected from the comparison group.

To dig deeper into the data, gain scores were calculated for each of the four major elements of PsyCap (Hope, Optimism, Self-efficacy and Resilience). A MANOVA was then performed with group (treatment vs. comparison) as the independent variable and the gain scores for the individual constructs as the dependent variable. Interestingly, the increase in PsyCap gain scores for self-efficacy [$F(1, 47) = 4.80$, $p=.033$] and hope [$F(1, 47) = 4.81$, $p=.033$] were significantly greater for participants in the treatment group than in the comparison group while no such significance was found in analyzing the gain scores for Optimism [$F(1, 47) = 2.05$, $p=.158$] or Resilience [$F(1, 47) = .992$, $p=.324$].

A mixed design ANOVA with a repeated measures factor (pre and post) and one

between-subjects factor (comparison group and treatment group) was also conducted to evaluate the effects of time and the intervention on the PsyCap gain scores of the participants. There was a significant interaction between time/group $F(1,1)=5.78, p=.02$. Thus, the difference in improvement in gain scores between the two groups was statistically significant with the treatment group outperforming the comparison group. Because there were only two levels, no post-hoc was needed.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a work-site intervention on the participants' PsyCap in determining its developmental capacity. Previous studies have demonstrated strong correlations between PsyCap and many of the positive outcomes managers and supervisors desire for their employees—high productivity, low absenteeism, positive organizational citizenship, etc. (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). With the results of the present study showing significantly greater improvement for the treatment group than their counterparts in the comparison group, it demonstrates that PsyCap can be developed and, consequently, these positive outcomes can be accessed by a focused work site intervention.

PsyCap scholars have described practical strategies employees could implement in order to improve in each of its four areas—self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Guangyi & Shanshan, 2016). Additionally, Luthans and his colleagues developed a short, 2-hour web based intervention which was designed to increase employee PsyCap. Utilizing a pretest, posttest experimental design, results showed gain scores in the treatment group improving by .18 and actually declining in the comparison

group by .05. With $p=.02$ and an effect size of $d=.19$, this intervention was indeed effective. However, the findings from the present study make a much stronger case for the developmental capacity of PsyCap through worksite interventions. Consider the following contributions: 1) Significant results and effect size; 2) The first intervention to meet the traditional expectation of being at least 6 weeks; 3) Because it took place in a larger group rather than online or a small group it underscores the synergistic possibilities for a team or organization.

Where the gain scores in the treatment group of the 2-hour training improved by .18, the gain scores in the treatment group of the 6-week training improved by .42 ($p<.01$). More significantly, using Cohen's d , the effect size in the 2-hour training was only $d=.19$ compared to $d=.79$ in the 6-week training. Although the 2-hour intervention provides a starting point to the discussion on the developmental potential of PsyCap, the results from the 6-week, face to face intervention makes this argument more compelling.

In comparing the treatment group with the comparison group, the MANOVA showed the differences in gain score to be significant for the constructs of Self-Efficacy and Hope. However, the constructs of resilience and optimism were not statistically significant. There are a few possibilities for these results. One statistical consideration is that when bearing in mind confidence intervals, the two constructs which did not show significance were actually not far from being statistically significant. Another consideration was the amount of time spent training on each of the respective constructs. In reviewing the training material it was evident that more time was devoted to practicing self-efficacy and hope than the other two constructs. Future trainings should give equal time to each of the four constructs.

A stated limitation in Luthan's study was the narrow time of the intervention as well as the limited time between pre- and posttest. Most health promotion interventions span a minimum of 6 weeks to ensure that the results are valid and sustained or a period of time (Helmhout et al., 2015; Miyachi et al., 2015; Saw, Kruger-Jakins, Endries, & Parker, 2016; Thorstensson, Roos, Peterson, & Ekdahl, 2005). The results from the present study represent the first attempt to implement a 6-week training designed specifically to develop PsyCap. Because of the significance found in the results of the intervention, it further strengthens the position of PsyCap and opens up the potential for replication and implementation in other organizations.

A review of health promotion interventions designed to address work related health concerns showed that work place health interventions are far more effective when conducted in larger groups rather than at an individual level (Bagnall, Jones, Akter, & Woodall, 2016). The intervention size for the present study was large enough to influence a broad population of the organization but small enough to allow for a more intimate and practical exploration of these concepts. The intervention aligned with the findings that a synergy can be created when training in a larger group setting rather than a one on one approach and can thus lead to greater improvement and development (Bagnall et al., 2016).

Limitations and Future Studies

The work-site intervention was facilitated at the request of a supervisor who was interested in motivating his teachers to see professional growth as an ongoing process and to find greater fulfillment in their work. Additionally, he desired this training to be used

as a certification project, thus increasing the teacher's earning potential. The convenience, nonrandomized sampling approach led to the intervention being targeted towards a specific, self-selected group. Future studies could implement a stratified random sampling design which would ensure that the treatment group was randomized while still accounting for other factors that may skew the population sample (specifically gender). Further, the sample used for this study drew from educators in a global religious education organization. Although the present study was more interested in gain scores than it was initial levels of PsyCap, it is nonetheless appropriate to state that the population was a relatively homogeneous group of professionals. To test the generalizability of this intervention, it would be important to draw from larger sample sizes encompassing a more diverse population in future studies.

Another threat to validity could have been common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The PCQ-24 (Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) was chosen in an effort to try to comparison for this threat as it is made up of 24 items which were measured on a six-point agreement scale, strongly disagree to strongly agree. Additionally, many items on the PCQ-24 are reverse scored which helps to minimize the threat of common method variance. However, the PCQ-24 was the only measurement used in the quantitative portion of this study. The absence of additional instruments limited the potential scope of the study. Future studies should use an occupational stress measurement or engagement instrument to test both the effect of the intervention as well as further substantiating the interaction between PsyCap and other possible outcomes.

A final limitation and opportunity for future direction was the absence of an

additional follow-up survey. Although the pre- and posttest data sets provided substantial clarity in differences of gain scores between the treatment group and the comparison group, it remains to be seen how the improvements in these scores perpetuated over time. To further test the longevity of the effectiveness of the intervention, future research should do a third follow-up survey of both the comparison group and the treatment group.

Conclusion

The recent surge of research surrounding POB and psychological capital is both long overdue and very encouraging. PsyCap appears to be a construct with strong correlations to many desired organizational outcomes (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011; Cheung et al., 2011; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010; Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Yousseff & Luthans, 2007). While PsyCap remains in its relative infancy, its emergence and its scientific approach provide the encouragement that it has staying power. Furthermore, it has the potential to attract even greater attention from organizational leaders both in the academic as well as in the private sector. The most apparent gap in the literature has been the need for empirical evidence of the developmental capacities of PsyCap and how to help employees and leaders to improve in this area. This study has demonstrated the developmental capabilities of PsyCap and the need for work site interventions designed to achieve such improvements. Additionally, it provides a window into future research which can help such interventions become more effective and also more accessible to larger populations.

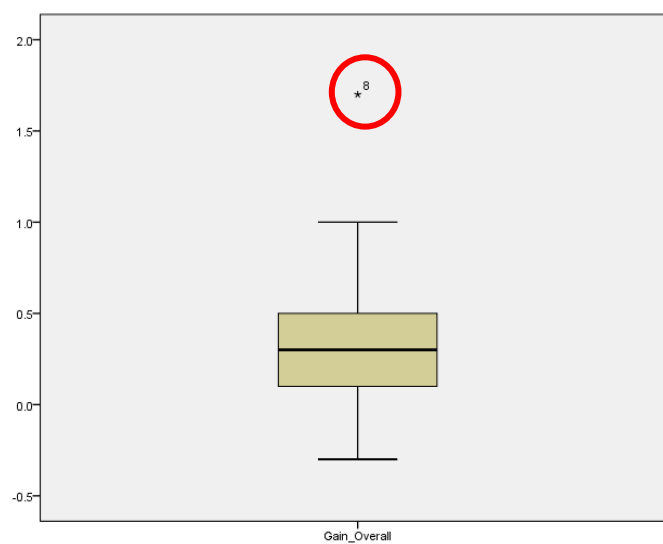


Figure 3.1. One Positive Outlier Found in the Data

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CHAPTER 4

A RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Abstract

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a construct that has quickly emerged and captured the attention of organizational behavior scholars across the world. Previous studies have found PsyCap to be positively connected to many desirable employee outcomes. However, although quantitative analysis of PsyCap has gained momentum, any efforts in qualitative exploration have been glaringly absent. Consequently, this article builds upon the quantitative data previously gathered as part of a larger study and draws from the richness offered in qualitative data analysis. Thirteen individuals were interviewed and their interviews were transcribed. Using the framework and parameters set forth in thematic analysis, the following three themes emerged from the data with great clarity and coverage: 1) The overarching influence of self-efficacy; 2) Thriving in the workplace; 3) A sense of meaning at work. The qualitative story told in this article provides a greater depth of understanding regarding individuals with high PsyCap than previous quantitative studies could allow and also underscores the developmental capacity of Psycap.

Introduction

Organizations are continually seeking to find a competitive advantage. This search has often led to an interest in understanding, developing, and maximizing capital. Academia abounds with literature surrounding capital and, like most concepts, it has evolved and expanded over time. Studies have focused on economic capital (primarily interested in *what you have* in terms of financials and assets and how to leverage these), human capital (focusing on *what you know* and what skills you have developed to contribute to the mission of the organization), social capital (concerned about *who you know* and how those relationships can better stimulate growth and success in an organization) and psychological capital (which has as its primary focus *who someone is* and how that will help them thrive in the workplace). Speaking of the concept of psychological capital one study suggested that, “Beyond human and social capital, psychological capital presents a comprehensible theoretical framework to understand the value of human beings by focusing on psychological capacities of individuals in organizational psychology” (Oruc & Kutanis, 2015, p. 1).

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is an emerging construct which stands on the shoulders of the positive psychology movement (Lazarus, 2003), carrying with it Dr. Martin Seligman’s charge to accentuate positive qualities and focus on what actions and attributes produce positively minded individuals, families, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). PsyCap represents an attempt to move that conversation into the workplace and is made up of four previously studied constructs: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Luthans & Yousseff, 2007; Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Pina, 2012;

Youseff & Luthans, 2007).

Over the past decade, research surrounding PsyCap has grown exponentially. Görgens-Ekermans and Herbert (2013) reported that PsyCap is being studied in China, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Portugal, South Africa, and is now being studied in parts of Australia (Dawkins, Martin, Scott, & Sanderson, 2015). Most of these studies employed strictly quantitative methods and focused primarily on outcomes. These studies have shown PsyCap to be positively connected to employees' attitudes, employee behavior, job performance/productivity, safety, commitment to organizational missions, well-being, organizational identify and citizenship, perceived supervisor support, authentic leadership, work happiness, and a decreased level of job stress (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre 2011; Cheung et al., 2011; Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013; Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, & Pigeon, 2010; Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004; Youseff & Luthans, 2007). While much has been gained from these quantitative studies, PsyCap scholars have suggested that qualitative studies need to be conducted in order to deepen understanding of this construct (Kutanis & Oruç, 2015), particularly since qualitative inquiry focuses on finding the richness, thickness, and descriptiveness of a data set (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This article is therefore a response to the call for a qualitative analysis of PsyCap and provides insights learned from individuals with high PsyCap as well as a better understanding of its developmental capacities.

Study Design

This study is part of a larger mixed methods design aimed at determining the efficacy of a worksite intervention in improving employee's psychological capital and better understanding individuals who have demonstrated high PsyCap.

A mixed methods design was chosen because it maximizes the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while minimizing each of their weaknesses (Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This portion of the study plays an important role in the body of literature surrounding PsyCap as scholars have suggested a clear need for qualitative data to help in the understanding of this construct (Oruc & Kutanis, 2015). The specific mixed methods design being implemented is the explanatory design using the participant selection model. An explanatory design is a two-phase, sequential approach which begins with quantitative analysis and then draws upon those data to determine individuals who will be asked to participate in a follow-up study.

Setting and Participants

The present study drew from full-time educators in northern Utah who are part of a large global organization. Because this was a mixed methods evaluation, the sample size was smaller than it would be if it employed a purely quantitative approach. The organization has developed a continuous improvement program which allows employees to design their own certification projects. These projects could be articles written, summaries of classes and seminars attended, syntheses from books and studies they have read, etc. Once they have completed a certain number of these projects they are awarded a certification credential. That credential then allows them to move into a higher

compensation track.

The Area Director sent an email to 180 employees offering credit for one certification project if they successfully completed the assignments in the intervention. At the time of the intervention's inception, 49 participants had agreed to participate either as a part of the treatment group or as a member of the comparison group (a 27% response rate). Of those participants, 39 agreed to complete the intervention as part of the treatment group while 10 were willing to represent the comparison group. However, seven individuals who had initially agreed to participate in the intervention as a member of the treatment group dropped out of the study without participating in the first session and agreed to move to the comparison group. There was no further attrition over the duration of the intervention. In summary, of the 49 total participants, 32 were part of the treatment group with 17 engaged as part of the comparison group. The average age of the participants was 42.5 years and the average tenure of service was 15.7 years. Of the 49 total participants 47 were male and only two female. The intervention was implemented June-July 2016, and follow-up interviews were conducted from September-October 2016.

Methods

Study Procedures

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Utah approved this study. Additionally, the proposal was approved by the organization's Education Research Committee (ERC). All 49 participants were sent the PCQ-24 1 week prior to the intervention as a pretest. The survey was sent via email with a link that could be completed at the participants' convenience anytime over the allotted week. The

intervention took place over a 6-week period of time with employees in the treatment group attending a 2-hour session every other week which included lecture, group discussions, visiting experts, and hands on learning activities. Following each training session, an email was sent to the participants in the treatment group including a brief review of important concepts discussed and assignments and exercises to complete prior to the next session.

The program began with an overview of what would be expected of the participants over the 6-week course, an introduction to positive organizational behavior, and a focus on the idea of living a career in crescendo. Following this introductory portion, the construct of self-efficacy was explored (Bandura, 1994) using lecture, group discussion and some hands on experiences. Dr. Jeffrey Thompson then trained on the concept in organizational behavior of work as a calling and how to seek and experience deeply meaningful work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

Session 2 focused on the constructs of hope and optimism. This session drew extensively from the research of Youseff and Luthans (2007), Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and the insightful contributions of other leading scholars on change (Heath & Heath, 2011; Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switler, 2011). Dr. Patricia Henrie-Barrus, a practicing therapist who specializes in positive psychology, then facilitated a training based on the science, principles, and constructs of positive psychology and practical applications of these concepts. Participants were invited to complete a series of exercises at home before the next session.

The third and final session reviewed many of the principles the participants had been learning about and practicing throughout the 6-week period and drew feedback and

analysis from the group. Dr. Glenn Richardson, a leading expert on resilience and resiliency, walked the participants through what he calls the “resilient journey” and facilitated their participation in resiliency mapping (see Richardson, 2002; Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990).

One week after the third session, all 49 participants were again sent the PCQ-24 as a posttest. The survey was sent via email with a link that could be completed at the participants’ convenience anytime over the course of that week. The study primarily analyzed PsyCap gain scores (difference between pre- and posttest scores) comparing the comparison group and the treatment group. Data were analyzed using a one-way between subjects ANOVA with treatment group vs. comparison as the independent variable and overall gain scores as the dependent variable. The increase in PsyCap overall gain scores was greater for participants in the treatment group ($M=.42$, $SE=.0$, $CI [.294, .544]$) than for those in the comparison group ($M=.165$, $SE=.062$, $CI [-.007, .337]$) [$F(1, 47) = .578$, $p=.02$], Cohens $d=.74$.

The purpose of this first phase was to determine the impact of a work site intervention on participants PsyCap scores. The scores for the participants in the treatment group showed significantly greater improvement than did their counterparts in the comparison group. Consequently, the results from this study not only substantiate the role of positive psychology in building an engaged and productive workforce, but suggest that psychological capital can be developed and, consequently, these positive outcomes can be accessed by a focused work site intervention.

The primary purpose of the second phase of the study was to draw from the richness offered in qualitative data analysis in an effort to better understand individuals

who have demonstrated high PsyCap and how it can be developed. Consequently, the selection criteria required that those interviewed: 1) Participate as part of the treatment group so as to be familiar with the concepts and language of psychological capital and 2) Score at least 5.3 on the overall PCQ-24 posttest. Of the 49 total participants in the study, 13 were found to meet the requirements of the selection criteria. The individuals who demonstrated the highest PsyCap were selected because, as positive organizational behavior argues, they can add to the body of knowledge regarding “positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002, p. 59).

Research Paradigm

The study was guided by a postpositivism paradigm which “has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, an emphasis on empirical data collection, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on apriority theories” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Ontologically, the foundational tenets of this paradigm are that “there is an *external* reality that can be (probabilistically) apprehendable. That is, a single reality exists and there is a real world externally out there independent of our interest in or knowledge of that world” (Smith, Sparkes, & Phoenix, 2012, p. 7). Research informed by this paradigm typically tries to formulate rules in an attempt to predict and influence as much as possible (Smith et al., 2012). This paradigm was selected because the focus of this study is to better understand individuals with high levels of PsyCap in an effort to learn how to help others to improve and develop greater PsyCap themselves.

Qualitative Design

Although the number of proposed theoretical traditions in qualitative research ranges anywhere from 5 to 45 (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Tesch, 1990), leading scholars in the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) focus their work on six of the more commonly used designs (Basic, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative theory, case studies). The basic design is the most common type of qualitative research and has been chosen for this study. While the primary paradigm guiding this study is postpositivism—with an assumption that there is an external reality—a basic design also has threads of constructivism woven into it as it seeks to better “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

The basic design assists in understanding how these employees interpret their experiences at work and what meaning they attribute to these experiences (2016). As Galli and Reel observed, “In contrast to phenomenology or grounded theory designs, in which researchers’ interpretations go beyond mere descriptions of participants’ experiences, basic descriptive designs are adopted when the goal is simply an increased understanding of a phenomenon” (2012, p. 301). Such is the primary objective of this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The interviews were facilitated by the author and the analysis was also led by the author. After the interviews were transcribed they were checked for accuracy and then sent out to each respective participant as part of the member checking process. Identities were removed and the data were entered into NVivo (QSR International, 2012).

A thematic analysis approach was chosen to code and analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Under this approach, Braun and Clark (2006) suggest the following six-phase analysis of the data: 1) Familiarizing yourself with your data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes; 5) Defining and naming themes; 6) Producing the report.

In generating the initial codes and analyzing the data there were two different approaches to consider: 1) inductive category development and 2) Deductive category development (Mayring, 2000). While an inductive approach involves “detailed readings of raw data in order to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by a researcher” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238), a deductive approach is used when the researcher begins with a theoretical framework already in mind. In this way, deductive analysis is more of a top-down type approach. The overall purpose of general coding analysis involves “the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place” (Bernard, 2006, p. 452; Cavanagh, 1997; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002; Mayring, 2000).

Even though the framework of PsyCap drove the interview questions in this study, an inductive approach was employed in an effort to allow the themes to arise organically from the data. However, as Braun and Clark cautioned, researchers cannot totally free themselves from their own preconceived biases nor can data coding take place in “an epistemological vacuum” (2006, p. 12). Although some have argued that being immersed in the literature before analyzing the data could skew the lens through which one views the data, others suggest that such “engagement with the literature can enhance your analysis by sensitizing you to more subtle features of the data” (Braun et al., 2006,

p. 16). This was true in the current study as the themes which came to the surface were all concepts housed in the disciplines of positive organizational behavior and positive organizational scholarship and which provide a clarity of connectivity that has not yet been apparent.

An analysis of the initial codes led to the emergence of three very distinct themes. Transcripts were then re-read chronologically. To gain greater clarity on the original themes identified, the transcripts were studied by cross analysis comparing responses by question. The proposed themes were reviewed, refined, and checked for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity to ensure the analysis was accurate and meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the author was confident in both the breadth and clarity of the themes, they were given their final names and definitions.

Trustworthiness

For qualitative research to have an effect it needs to be valid, reliable, and demonstrate appropriate rigor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell explained that “regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (2016, p. 237). Unlike quantitative research, validity, reliability, and credibility in qualitative research are primarily measured on its being trustworthy.

Smith suggested that one way of determining trustworthy claims is to ensure the proper use of methods (1993). While interpretivists would likely disagree with the role of methods in trustworthiness, this study was guided by the postpositivist paradigm and thus

the techniques used to measure trustworthiness will align with this paradigm (Smith, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Consequently, the first measure of trustworthiness in this study was in its methods.

Participants were selected using the data from the quantitative portion of the study. Those individuals who demonstrated the highest level of PsyCap were selected for the study. The specific agreed upon boundaries set for the selection process helped ensure that the decision was not impacted by bias. The second way trustworthiness was addressed was in using a detailed interview guide. While the interview guide provided the foundational questions, the format remained semistructured thus allowing freedom for the interviewee's response to influence the direction the interview takes. Thus, the interview guide assisted in maintaining the integrity of purpose and intent of the study while allowing for additional probes to better understand the participant's experiences (Kvale 2007).

Once the interviews were completed, member checking was employed to ensure that the thoughts and experiences of each participant were accurately captured. Participants were given the option to receive either a hard copy of the transcript or to receive a soft copy via email. They were asked to check for discrepancies and invited to make any adjustments to the transcript. It has been suggested that member checking "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126).

Another way in which potential issues of trustworthiness were addressed was in

the process of triangulation. By virtue of doing a mixed methods design triangulating methods of data collection were implemented. Triangulation also took place across participants. Additionally, peer examination was utilized to address the potential of any biases which may have resulted from only one person's analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, the entire procedure of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data was detailed and the approach for data coding was likewise outlined.

Results

Using the framework and parameters set forth in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the following three themes emerged from the data with great clarity and coverage: 1) The overarching influence of self-efficacy; 2) Thriving in the workplace; 3) A sense of meaning at work. The qualitative story to be told in this section provides a greater depth of understanding regarding individuals with high PsyCap than previous quantitative studies could allow. While many other ideas were found in the analysis, the three themes mentioned come with substantial previous research and do much to peel back the proverbial curtains in understanding the development and characteristics of PsyCap.

The Overarching Influence of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as “one’s conviction (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajovic & Luthans, 1998). Albert Bandura expressed that “self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel,

think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes” (1994, p. 71). Furthermore, it has been called the “best fit” in meeting the definitional criteria of PsyCap (Luthans, 2002) and has the most established and substantiated research support (Bandura, 1997; Maurer & Pierce, 1998; Parker, 1998). It has been suggested that self-efficacy can be developed in the following four ways: 1) Performance accomplishments (Your own personal successful experiences can lead to greater self-efficacy); 2) Vicarious experiences (Observing someone else successfully accomplish a task can lead to greater self-efficacy); 3) Verbal Persuasion (Encouraging words and constructive feedback can instill greater self-efficacy as it may help overcome self-doubt); 4) Physiological states (Your own personal emotional state can impact your self-efficacy, both positively and negatively. The way in which we interpret and respond to these emotions can improve self-efficacy).

While self-efficacy was just one of the four elements in PsyCap, it appeared to have a broad effect as it seemed to influence the participants’ perception of their resilience, hope, and optimism. The following data substantiate this finding.

The code “PA” represented the role of performance accomplishments in the development of PsyCap. When responding to various questions from all four constructs of the PCQ-24, participants emphasized the role of previous experience in their development. One participant summarized it well when they said, “Intuition, built through experience, enabled the opportunity for strategizing and game-planning towards solutions to be much more purposeful.” Another noted that their “confidence has been developed through experience” and the more that we experience something like that

the more confidence we have.” When asked to explore what led to their development of the constructs in PsyCap they gave responses like, “I think experience and having great hope that there are solutions,” and “my experience has born that out to me,” or “a lot of it is experience, and that comes through time and development.” Others commented that “experience has given me a sense of security” and how “past experience has led to the idea that [they] can do it again.” After having explained various contributions to their development, one participant simply said, “Previous success is what really helps.”

When talking about the construct of hope, participants expressed how “every situation that you confront that ends positively helps lead to more belief that that's possible. So every student that was just not connected ... and not engaged, but that I have helped, leads me to believe that I can do it with the next one.” Each of these examples illustrates the concept that life experience is often the greatest teacher anyone can have. This seems particularly true in the development of PsyCap. Further, previous successes may be the best contributor to confidence and success in the future. It is therefore worth great effort for individuals to obtain and learn from these experiences and for managers and supervisors to help facilitate such experiences.

The Code “VE” was used to represent the role of vicarious experience in the development of PsyCap. Participants talked about learning from “really smart people,” specific mentors mentioned by name, examples from curriculum that have worked, and “people who had amazing capacity.” Others spoke of learning from people outside of the workplace and how they helped shape them professionally. For example, one participant said, “My father passed away when I was young, five years old, almost six, and so I grew up kind of having to analyze a lot of things on my own. I was the oldest of three

children and so I had to help a lot. ...I watched my mom, who had lots of different struggles because she never remarried and was raising three kids. And I watched her do that, I think that was helpful.” The following story underscores the potential influence of these vicarious experiences in helping individuals develop greater PsyCap and decrease stress.

I was raised in a very negative environment and so that's the tendency for my mind to go. The default mode is to go negative where I think, “oh man everything is you know, everything's going wrong.” We had a son being born ... I was still clueless on the whole delivery thing and one of the nurses came in and you know, we're just standing there and then all of the sudden she looks at the monitor and goes, “oh, no wonder she didn't notice. This is in the wrong place” and she went to try to put the paper back into the heart machine, and uh, it fell on the floor. She's totally flustered and got on the phone and called some code and we ended up having like five or six nurses pop into that room and she's just giving orders ... “you do this, you do this, you do this” and then she turned to my wife and said, “we need to get your baby out right now. We called your doctor, he's on his way, but we need to get this baby out now.” And we ...still have no idea what's going on and so you have all these nurses and...you know and I'm still going okay, so what's happening. So then the doctor came and when he walked in, just, a calmness came and he asked for the fetal monitor that he could use and so he put that in and now we could hear the heart rate and with each contraction my wife was having his heart was stopping. So he would have her push and you would hear the heart slow down, slow down and then all the sudden stop. And then he'd say “okay quit pushing.” And then she'd stop pushing and then the heart rate would slowly start coming back up and then get back up to speed. And then it's just quiet in this room. Everybody just focused on the doctor. The baby was born, our son was born, and everything was fine. Afterwards I was asking the doctor, “so is that pretty scary” and he says, “Really scary.” Then I said “how are you so calm?” And he said, “You have two options. You can be really stressed out and have everybody up in arms or you can be calm. Either way the same. The outcome's going to be the same.” And the he said, “so I choose to be calm.” And just from [that example] looking at it by being calm, I think that lowers the stress levels when I have stressful situations at work.

The code “VP” indicated the influence of verbal persuasion. While examples were given of verbal persuasion coming from colleagues, friends, and family members, the most pronounced influence was from supervisors and mentors. A participant shared how a conversation with one of his mentors became a significant turning point when he was

student teaching and trying to get hired to teach full-time. His mentor came into his office and said, “How are you feeling about things?” His response was telling, “I’m, ya know, I’m stressed.” When asked why he was stressed he said, “I just love this so much. Honestly, I feel like if I don’t have this as a career, I’ll always feel like, for me personally, I’m not doing exactly what I wanted to, you know?” His mentor then said, “You have it. You’re a great teacher, and I don’t tell you that to lead you on, I don’t know what’s going to happen, all I know right now is that on our faculty you may be the best teachers, and you’re a student teacher. You’re doing great things.” The participant commented how that moment, combined with another similar exchange, instilled great confidence in him. He concluded, “I started to almost want to live up to what they thought I already was....So I would say those moments were pivotal.”

PsyCap scholars have argued that the construct of self-efficacy is the best fit in meeting the definitional criteria of PsyCap (Luthans, 2002) and has the most established and substantiated quantitative research support (Bandura, 1997; Maurer & Pierce, 1998; Parker, 1998;). The data from the qualitative portion of this study seem to confirm that claim while also suggesting that self-efficacy plays a larger role in the overarching development of PsyCap as well. While being asked questions regarding all four of the elements of PsyCap on the PSQ-24, the influence of self-efficacy—with its focus on performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion— were laced throughout the interviews.

A Sense of Meaning at Work

It has been said that “working is about the search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash. For astonishment rather than torpor; in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying” (Terkel, 1975, p. 1). The literature surrounding meaningful work originated from philosophical discussions on finding greater meaning in life. This concept of meaning is tied to an individual’s quest to find purpose and significance whether it is in their personal life, their family life, or in their professional life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2002; Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009).

Discussions and interest surrounding meaningful work seem to be gaining momentum. Because many employees spend about a third of their time at work, their job often becomes the crucible in which they find purpose and meaning. It is often in this professional setting where individuals set and achieve the goals which help drive their personal development (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Meyers, 2007; Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010).

There seem to also be indicators suggesting that the modern workforce is in the midst of an evolution. Indeed, “evidence has been brought forward to suggest that money is losing its power as a central motivator partially due to the general population realising that above a minimum level necessary for survival, money adds little to their subjective well-being” (Geldenhuys, Karolina, & Venter, 2014, p. 1). Studies have suggested that individuals who find meaning in their work report greater job satisfaction (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007), have demonstrated stronger work engagement (Fairlie, 2011; Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Hoole, 2015), are more satisfied with their lives (Wrzesniewski

et al., 1997), are less likely to suffer significant job stress (Oates, 2005), and have displayed greater work-life balance (Munn, 2013).

Closely related to meaningful work is the concept of work as a calling (Berg et al., 2010; Berkelaaar & Buzzanell, 2015; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy et al., 2015; Elangovan et al., 2010; Hunter et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2010). Bunderson and Thompson expressed that one of the underlying assumptions in professional callings is that “work done solely for economic or career advancement reasons is unlikely to inspire a sense of significance, purpose, or transcendent meaning. When viewed as one’s calling, however, work assumes both personal and social significance” (2009, p. 3). This sense of purpose and significance lies at the heart of meaningful work.

The participants who were interviewed in this study—those who demonstrated the highest PsyCap—emphasized this sense of purpose and meaning in their work. One talked about how motivating it is “understanding that the work you are doing is meaningful, that it has purpose.” Others mentioned “being invested in the purpose and vision of the company,” and feeling like “my work was meaningful and significant.” The idea of work as a calling came up as individuals said things like, “I’m optimistic because I know I’m supposed to be in this career and I know that the things that I’m doing in [this organization] are fulfilling a purpose,” and “I feel confident that I’m supposed to be teaching the courses that I am....and feel that this is what I’m supposed to be doing.” Another summarized this sense of meaning and calling by expressing “a deep belief that this is where I’m supposed to be.”

These concepts of purpose, meaning, and calling carry with them a responsibility and obligation to perform at a high level (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). One teacher

said, “Every student relies on you giving your best, right now. You can't just pull out a lesson that you taught a while ago and expect them to just do awesome. It just doesn't work that way.” Another suggested that “you can't fudge a lesson. You have to be on spot every single time.” Many of the participants focused on this sense of responsibility by suggesting the need to make an impact. One of the teachers who scored the highest on the PCQ-24 said, “I see the good that it does in the individual lives of both teachers and students. I've seen the impact it has on families. I see the impact it has on individuals, I see the impact it has in lives of the leadership and all those who participate in it.” Sometimes this desire for impact was spoken of as being the ultimate goal and the measure of success. For example, one said that “The greatest goal, for me, is to impact my students in a positive way” while another suggested, “if I just have little indications along the way that there's an impact being made, then I think I feel successful.” Another participant hearkened back to the responsibility that comes with this perspective when they said, “I think that the stresses that come with teaching over the years, for me, have been with, um, am I reaching students or having the impact that we want to have with students. If there is a stress then that's probably it.” Regardless of why they were focused on impact, it was clear that the individuals with high PsyCap desire to “reach,” “influence,” and even “transform” the lives of their students.

Thriving in the Workplace

The field of positive organizational scholarship provides the umbrella for a multitudinous array of constructs focused on productivity and engagement in the workplace. Consider the following list (literally ranging from A to Z): Affect in the

workplace, appreciative inquiry, authentic leadership, compassion at work, flow in the workplace, hardiness, job crafting, job fulfillment, job involvement, job performance, job satisfaction, meaningful work, organizational commitment, organizational virtuousness, perceived organizational support, resilience, self-efficacy, subjective wellbeing at work, vigor, vitality, work as a calling, work centrality, work engagement, work happiness, and zest. While this list is extensive, the essence of many of these constructs is quite similar. For example, while there are various nuances distinguishing such constructs as flow, job involvement, vigor, vitality, work engagement, and zest from each other, the common theme in each case is the feeling, energy, and experience of an individual while engaging in their work.

One of the constructs that effectively captures the essence of each of these concepts is the idea of “thriving.” When employees are thriving “they feel progress and momentum” in their work which is represented by 1) a sense of *vitality* and 2) a sense of *learning* (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 537). *Vitality* denotes positive feelings of aliveness, spirit, and energy (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some scholars suggest that professional vitality could be viewed “as a synergy between high satisfaction, productivity and engagement that allows faculty members to maximize professional success and achieve goals following institutional goals” (Palmer, Dankoski, Smith, Brutkiewicz, & Bogdewic, 2011).

Learning represents a commitment to personal and professional development and growth. Speaking on the importance of thriving containing both vitality and learning, it was suggested that, “One can envision employees who show vitality at work, but over time, this vitality will likely fade if they do not have opportunities for learning and

growth, which replenish their vitality. By the same token, one can envision employees who are constantly learning at work but lack the vitality to apply their new knowledge and skills over time. The two components of thriving interact to create an overall sense of forward momentum and progress at work that is not captured by either vitality or learning alone” (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2013, p. 435).

While there is an inherent connection between the literature surrounding meaningful work and the construct of thriving, a key difference is that meaningful work seems most interested in the “what,” the “where” and the “why” of work, while thriving focuses more on the “how.” Said differently, meaningful work really wants to understand what an individual is doing for work, where they are doing it, and why they have decided to pursue that occupation. While thriving clearly draws upon the idea of why an individual is in a certain job, scholars are most interested in how that job is being performed (vigor, dedication, aliveness, absorption, etc) and how employees can become even more productive in their work. The two components of thriving—learning and vitality— emerged as clear themes in the analysis of the data in this study and provide unique insights from the previous discussion on meaningful work.

Learning

As the data coded as “learning” were analyzed, two subthemes emerged: “A desire to be better” and “trying something new.”

When addressing various questions from the PCQ-24, participants stressed a desire and a drive to improve and to push themselves professionally. One poignant example is a teacher who was going have his own daughter in class in the coming year.

He said, “I kind of always think to myself, when she gets here, I want to make sure that I’m as fresh and as sharp as I’ve ever been, for her sake as well as all the other students.”

Another teacher tied the need to progress to aforementioned idea of impact as he suggested, “if you are wanting to make real impact I think you take a look at your lesson, find out where it is weak and make a small goal and say tomorrow I’m going to nail this part or I’m going to work on that part.” Others commented on the fact that because the organization focused extensively on growth, it made it easier for them to push themselves personally. Some expressed that honing in on teaching skills and techniques has helped them develop and improve in the classroom.

Several of the participants emphasized both a love for teaching and a drive to improve because of that love. For example, one participant said, “I still have a great desire to not only teach, but to be a better teacher to be a more effective teacher, a clearer teacher.” Others said things like, “I still have a love for learning,” or, “I enjoy growth, and I enjoy learning,” and “luckily I don’t think I’ve peaked or plateaued.”

Many of the participants talked about the need to be strategic in their improvement efforts. Because one teacher desperately wanted to get better, they said, “I try and be self-aware and work on it and try and improve my craft and to be a better teacher. I am excited about that concept.” Another, sharing this same desire, laid out part of his own developmental process. He explained, “if [the lesson] is dry and *I’m* bored in the middle of it and *I* just want the clock to just hurry it up and let me out of my misery, like, I can see in those moments what things I’m doing and just evaluate it. I don’t always have a solution to it but I can at least become aware of what’s happening and prepare my next lesson or even after class make adjustments to that lesson and figure out how to

make it pop a little bit better, how to make it work a little bit better.” He explained how he would have a highlighter and a red pen and be making notes in his lesson plan during the lesson so that it would become more and more refined each time he would teach it.

One participant provided the following insightful key to self-improvement and learning: “I think you can sense, at least in the classroom, when it goes well and when it doesn't...that helps you to bring awareness ...And then those moments open the door to be okay with being vulnerable.” He expressed how in those moments of vulnerability we realize we are not perfect but have potential to get better and then said, “I think there's something cool about that.” Another participant shared that same appreciation for these experiences as he expressed that “the process of trying to get better is just enjoyable for me.” This desire and passion to get better was succinctly summarized by a teacher as he said, “Success, to me, is a continual thing. It's not a place I arrive at.”

Vitality

As was noted earlier, some scholars have suggested that vitality denotes positive feelings of aliveness, spirit, and energy (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) while others broaden the scope defining it as “a synergy between high satisfaction, productivity and engagement” (Palmer, Dankoski, Smith, Brutkiewicz, & Bogdewic, 2011). Interestingly, the data showed both perspectives and were thus coded as “energy/excitement” and “enjoyment/fulfillment.”

Energy/Excitement. “I come to work each day excited to prepare new lessons ... I love what I do!” That statement represents the general feeling of many of the individuals interviewed. Speaking of the desire to impact the lives of students, one teacher even went so far as to say, “I think that if you're not enthusiastic about that then you probably need to change careers.” This idea of having an excitement for the classroom and for the work of a teacher was an overwhelming theme for the participants in this study. For example, they said things like, “I enjoy this processes, I get energized by it and I'm contributing to try to help build the program,” and “I'm in a profession that I love. I love studying. I love being with the youth.... Everything I do here energizes me!” Others said, “I'm excited to see how my career unfolds,” and, when trying to emphasize this point, one participant spoke, then paused, and trying to gather the right words simply said, “That has been, I mean, it just energizes!”

Speaking of this energy, one participant commented how “part of the energy comes from understanding that the work you're doing is meaningful.” Another spoke on the process of lesson preparation and teaching when they said, “there's some intrinsic excitement in what we do and when it goes right, it just really sings. It's, it's fun!” One teacher reflected back on the intervention that took place as part of this study and said, “these ideas from positive psychology really have ignited things from the past and that has given me greater energy now, greater direction, and I see things completely differently now.” Finally, speaking of a career as a whole and the professional growth experienced in the process, one participant shared, “That’s given me a bit of a rush! I think every new assignment has given me a set of new challenges that just became, for me, high adventure, which is like, wow! ... I hope I never lose that!” An excitement,

enthusiasm and energy for their work was a common feeling and expression among these individuals with high PsyCap.

Enjoyment/Fulfillment. When asked if he saw himself as successful in his work one teacher explained that “my internal feedback loop tells me I’m doing a good job because of the enjoyment factor. That I’m working hard, I know I’m working hard, I’m learning a lot and I’m enjoying it.” Work enjoyment and fulfillment cannot be overstated as a key to productivity, engagement, and psychological capital (Al-Dubai, 2013; Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002).

One participant shared that they “absolutely love what [they] do for a living so putting energy into that is easy.” Commenting on the role of their support network, a teacher shared how there were periods of his career “where [participation and council] had been fostered, ennobled, held out and encouraged and I thrived in it.” One administrator said, “I feel like the teachers that I work with are thriving. We’ve created an expectation and an atmosphere where they are happy in their work.” Another administrator said that he feels “a lot of fulfillment when an employee is doing well.” Work fulfillment often spills over into the employee’s personal life and can lead to a greater quality of life. People find, as did one of the participants in this study, that you can “feel very fulfilled in [your] life when [you’re] having professional success.”

Discussion

Although scholars have focused extensively on the construct of PsyCap and the various connections to other positive work outcomes, there have been relatively few

studies showing how it is developed and even fewer that provide a qualitative look at this construct. This study provided insight into both the development of PsyCap as well as a richer understanding of individuals who have demonstrated high PsyCap.

This study further substantiated the findings of previous research confirming that self-efficacy can be developed through personal performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion. While the questions asked in the interviews came from the four sections of the PCQ-24 (Self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience), the influence of self-efficacy appeared in the participant's answers to all four sections. The assumptions from this finding are that interventions designed to increase PsyCap should help participants to learn how to draw upon their own personal successes and use them to lead to success in the future. The influence of previous experiences seemed to have the greatest impact on the confidence and successes of the individuals with high PsyCap. Trainers, managers, and administrators should also provide individuals with opportunities to see other people successfully performing the task being asked of them. Finally, as employees heard positive feedback when they are performing a task successfully they expressed a greater confidence in their ability to find solutions to difficult situations and also confidence to succeed in their assigned work.

Does high PsyCap lead to more meaningful work or does a sense of purpose and meaning in work lead to greater PsyCap? In reality, the answer is likely the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the two. One thing that *is* clear is that the relationship between PsyCap and meaningful work does indeed exist and organizational leaders can use that understanding to help employees to be more productive and engaged in their work. Furthermore, this study showed that individuals with high PsyCap demonstrated a

confidence in maneuvering through work challenges, including finding a position that best fits their particular skill set. Finding that position, in the case of this study as a teacher or as an administrator, will greatly improve the likelihood that the individual views their work with a sense of purpose and meaning.

Although the construct of *thriving* is relatively new to the literature in positive organizational scholarship, it is gaining momentum as scholars build on the combination of learning and working with a sense of energy or aliveness. This study showed a strong correlation between individuals with high PsyCap and thriving. In many ways this study substantiates the work done by Paterson et al. (2013) who looked at thriving and its impact on PsyCap and supervisor support. The individuals interviewed in the present study add voice to the statistical analysis provided Paterson's article. This study also confirmed the need for both elements of thriving—learning and energy. The participants interviewed showed the forward momentum that can be developed when the combination of desiring to learn and progress and working energetically and enthusiastically in your work are employed together.

Limitations and Future Studies

The overall design for this study was selected because of the desires of the local Area Director to challenge the teachers to take ownership of their professional development and increase their earning potential through completing this intervention as one of their projects. This approach led to the intervention being targeted towards a specific, self-selected group. Future studies could implement a stratified random sampling design which would ensure that the treatment group was randomized while still

accounting for other factors that may skew the population sample (specifically gender). Another interesting approach would be to interview the section of the sample who scored lowest on the PCQ-24 and compare their responses to those captured in this study.

Another limitation of this study was that the sample used drew from educators in a global religious education organization. While the present study was more interested in gain scores than it was initial levels of psychological capital, it is nonetheless appropriate to state that the population was a relatively homogeneous group of professionals. To test the generalizability of this intervention it would be important to draw from larger sample sizes encompassing a more diverse population.

Questions used in the interview guide for this study were taken exclusively from the PCQ-24. It could be beneficial to look to other instruments, such as the Gallup 12 survey, which provide questions designed to analyze work engagement. It could also be useful to look at asking questions regarding job stress and the correlation between PsyCap and levels of job stress.

There is an inherent time limitation in a study focused on changing behavior and perspective. A study design such as this (pre- and posttest with a follow-up interview) can indeed provide valuable data in assessing the efficacy of a program or the developmental capacities of a construct. However, to determine the long-term impact of an intervention, a longitudinal study would be required.

A final consideration for future research would be to add a qualitative element in determining the efficacy of the intervention itself. While the quantitative analysis focused on the impact of the intervention, the qualitative questions were answering a slightly different research question. Perhaps interviewing participants about various parts of the

intervention would help underscore the impact of the intervention as well as providing invaluable feedback to make it more effective in future trainings.

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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

The American Institute of Stress found that 75% to 90% of all doctor visits are now stress-related (Kalia, 2002). Furthermore, reports have shown that 1 of 4 American workers suffers a mental health problem rooted in stress (Kalia, 2002). Scholars across many disciplines have worked to better understand stress. This broad interdisciplinary interest has led to research performed on student stress, economic stress, job stress, familial stress, and others. Organizational scholars have likewise long sought to understand what causes stress and how to moderate against it. Studies have shown that 20% of payroll often goes directly to stress related issues (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009) and it is estimated that \$150 billion of revenue is lost to stress annually in absenteeism, poor decision-making, stress-related mental illness, and substance abuse (Kalia, 2002). The World Health Organization recently declared “occupational stress to be a worldwide epidemic” (Avey et al., 2009).

With organizations continually seeking to find a competitive advantage, workplace health is a compelling place to start. Scholars found that psychological capital (PsyCap) can both decrease occupational stress while also mitigating against job incivility. This finding further suggested that “PsyCap may reduce or prevent a person from responding to stressful situations in an uncivil manner . . . Individuals who feel

overworked or strained may respond to stressors by lashing out at their coworkers in a rude and disrespectful manner. Additionally, individuals low in PsyCap may lack the psychological resources that are necessary for positive workplace interactions” (Roberts, Scherer, & Bowyer, 2011, p. 454). Conversely, employees who are satisfied with and find fulfillment in their work are more productive, absent less, reported having less job stress, and demonstrated greater organizational loyalty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Culbertson & Fullagar, 2010; Karimi, & Alipour, 2011; Perrin, 1998).

This study built on the foundational findings of PsyCap scholars and explored two major gaps in the existing literature. While much attention has been dedicated to understanding this construct and its relational outcomes from a quantitative perspective, the following gaps remained: 1) There had been little done to show how to actually develop greater PsyCap and 2) PsyCap scholars have suggested a clear need for qualitative data to provide greater depth, richness, and understanding (Oruc & Kutanis, 2015). This study employed a mixed methods design which evaluated a work site intervention in determining its efficacy on influencing employees’ PsyCap. It further explored this construct from a qualitative perspective and provided insights learned from individuals with high PsyCap as well as a better understanding of its development.

Forty-nine individuals participated in this study with 32 completing the intervention as part of the treatment group and 17 representing the comparison group. The average age of the participants was 42.5 years and the average tenure of service was 15.7 years. The intervention took place over a 6-week period of time with employees in the treatment group attending a 2-hour session every other week which included lecture, group discussions, visiting experts, and hands on learning activities. Following each

training session an email was sent to the participants in the treatment group including a brief review of important concepts discussed and assignments and exercises to complete prior to the next session.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis found that the intervention led to a statically significant improvement in the participant's PsyCap scores. The study also found that there was a significant difference in gain scores between the treatment group and the comparison group with individuals in the treatment group showing greater improvement than their counterparts in the comparison group. These findings were compared to the results of a highly focused, 2-hour web-based training intervention which was designed to develop positive psychological capital (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008). The present study showed significantly higher gain scores and a larger effect size than did the web based training.

Qualitative Findings

The primary purpose of the second phase of this study was to draw from the richness offered in qualitative data analysis in an effort to better understand individuals who have demonstrated high PsyCap and how it can be developed. The selection criteria required that those interviewed 1) Participate as part of the treatment group so as to be familiar with the concepts and language of psychological capital and 2) Score at least 5.3 on the overall PCQ-24 post-test. Of the 49 total participants in the study, 13 were found to meet the requirements of the selection criteria. The individuals who demonstrated the

highest PsyCap scores were selected because, as positive organizational behavior argues, they can add to the body of knowledge regarding “positively oriented human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002, p. 59).

As interview transcripts were analyzed the following three themes emerged with great clarity and coverage: 1) The overarching influence of self-efficacy; 2) A sense of meaning at work; 3) Thriving in the workplace. The concepts captured in these themes have substantial supporting research independently, but this study showed a synergistic influence which significantly aided in understanding what high PsyCap looks like in an individual as well as ideas on how leaders and administrators can help their employees to develop it.

While self-efficacy itself is one of the four constructs including in PsyCap, this study showed that these four constructs do not all have equal impact. This idea was shown both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, the increase in PsyCap gain scores for self-efficacy were significantly greater for participants in the treatment group than in the comparison group while two of the other three constructs showed no such significance. Qualitatively, this study showed how self-efficacy plays a significant role in the overarching development of PsyCap as the ideas at the core of the development of self-efficacy—performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion—were laced throughout the interviews. The interview transcripts repeatedly showed the influence of the participant’s previous experiences in helping them to develop confidence in their ability to do their work. They also showed how previous experiences gave them the ability to work through difficult situations at work and at home while also

giving them a sense of optimism that “things are going to work out” because, as they said, “things have always seemed to work out before.” The study also showed a similar result when individuals saw someone else perform a task successfully and they seemed to be particularly influenced by the examples of personal mentors and administrators.

Meaningful work and PsyCap have not been overtly connected in previous research but this study showed a strong connection between the two. The participants who scored the highest on the PCQ-24 viewed their work with a strong sense of meaning and purpose. In addition to describing their work as meaningful and having a sense of purpose, they also used words like “significant,” and spoke of how it is what they were “supposed to be doing.” Additionally, they showed that this sense of purpose also brought with it a sense of responsibility to “make an impact,” to “reach these students,” and to “influence” for good.

While the previous two themes seemed to rise to the surface during the interviewing process, the final theme—thriving in the workplace—emerged quite surprisingly during the analysis of the transcripts. The ideas of energy, enthusiasm, and love for what they were doing quickly became apparent in the process of analysis. Likewise the participants’ repetition of their desire to improve and to be better also became clear from the analysis. However, it wasn’t until a return to the literature that the construct of thriving was rediscovered “as a synergy between high satisfaction, productivity and engagement” (Palmer, Dankoski, Smith, Brutkiewicz, & Bogdewic, 2011). This study provides a closer look at the two key elements of thriving—vitality and learning— and substantiates the argument that “the two components of thriving interact to create an overall sense of forward momentum and progress at work that is not captured

by either vitality or learning alone” (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2013, p. 435). New insights into this construct emerged when participants described “learning” as both a desire to get better and trying something new and spoke of “vitality” as energy and excitement but also as enjoyment and fulfillment. Implications from these insights could be explored in greater detail in future studies.

Limitations

The design for this study had some inherent limitations. Because the study was done at the invitation of the sponsoring organization, the sample was restricted to a specific, self-selected group of teachers and administrators. The danger of self-selected bias is that it represent a nonprobable sample and may not represent the larger population, even within this same organization. Also, the PCQ-24 was the only measurement used in the quantitative portion of this study. The absence of additional instruments likewise limited the potential scope of the study.

Another limitation of this study was that the sample drew from educators in a global religious education organization. While the present study was more interested in gain scores than it was initial levels of psychological capital, the population was a relatively specialized homogeneous group of professionals. Additionally, because the majority of employees in this organization are male, there were very few female participants in the study. An interesting companion study to this would be to perform the intervention on an all female population and analyze the differences in gain scores.

There is an inherent “time” limitation in a study focused on changing both behavior and perspective. A study design such as this (pre- and posttest with a follow-up

interview) can indeed provide valuable data in assessing the efficacy of a program or the developmental capacities of a construct. However, the design did not provide any follow-up testing or follow-up interviews to confirm that the changes represented in the results of the study would actually remain in the weeks, months, and years to follow.

A final limitation could be the procedures of the study. The same person who led the training also facilitated the work done between sessions, asked the interview questions, transcribed many of the interviews, and analyzed the transcripts of the interviews. This was somewhat mitigated by member checking and peer reviewing. However, it remains a potential limitation to the study.

Future Directions

The research presented in this mixed methods study adds to the research of positive organizational behavior and positive organization scholarship. Its most natural fit might well be in organizational health and organizational psychology as it analyzed workplace interventions designed to decrease job stress by increasing the psychological capacities of its participants. The first suggestion for future research would be in taking the next step from the present study and detailing a curriculum for an intervention which could be replicated and provided to employers and organizational leaders. Packaged with the PCQ-24, this could be invaluable for organizations seeking to promote workplace health and safety while providing a built in sample to be studied by PsyCap scholars.

Because of the self-selected nature of the design of this study, future studies could implement a stratified random sampling design which would ensure that the treatment group was randomized while still accounting for other factors that may skew the

population sample (specifically gender). To test the generalizability of this intervention it would be important to draw from larger sample sizes encompassing a more diverse population.

Future studies could also look to other instruments such as the Gallup 12 survey to further triangulate the design and to provide potential connects with work engagement. It could also be useful to look at asking questions regarding job stress and the correlation between PsyCap and levels of job stress.

Because of the need to analyze the longevity of the effects of an intervention, a longitudinal study should also be considered. This would help guard against a potential placebo effect.

A final consideration for future research would be to add a qualitative element in determining the efficacy of the intervention itself. While the quantitative analysis focused on the impact of the intervention, the qualitative questions were answering a different research question. Perhaps interviewing participants about various parts of the intervention would help underscore the impact of the intervention as well as provide invaluable feedback to make it more effective in future trainings.

Conclusion

The recent surge of research surrounding Positive Organizational Behavior and psychological capital is both long overdue and very encouraging. PsyCap appears to be a construct with strong correlations to many desired organizational outcomes. While PsyCap remains in its relative infancy, its emergence and its scientific approach provide the encouragement that it has staying power. Furthermore, it has the potential to attract

even greater attention from organizational leaders both in academia and in the private sector. The gaps in the literature have been the need for empirical evidence of the developmental capacities of PsyCap and how to help employees and leaders to improve in this area. This study has provided an example of the potential change and development that come through a focused work site intervention in increasing the PsyCap of employees. It also provides opportunities for future research which can help such interventions become more effective and also more accessible to larger populations.

The qualitative portion of this study provided a rich look at the attributes, attitudes, and approaches common in people with high PsyCap. With such clear themes emerging from their interviews, individuals can see various ways in which they can develop these same characteristics. Aligned with the objective of positive psychology to learn from, rather than ignore (or even delete) positive outliers, this study concludes with an example of positive deviance from the statistical outlier reported in Chapter 3 of this study (see Figure 5.1).

Using the PCQ-24 pretest and posttest data, the average gain score reported for the comparison group in this study was .165 while the average for the treatment group jumped to .419. The single outlier reported in this study scored 3.8 on the pretest and jumped to 5.5 on the posttest for a gain score of 1.7. This individual met the prescribed criteria to be selected for the second phase of the study and was thus interviewed in an effort to better understand his experience in developing PsyCap. In his interview he described what led to this confidence in his ability succeed in his work. He shared how, until recently, he has actually not really had much confidence or enthusiasm in his work. He explained how he used to be confident and used to have great professional ambitions.

He was engaged, enthusiastic, and sure that he could accomplish anything he wanted. He elaborated on those times but then shared how life experiences seemed to pound it out of him making him very self-conscious in both his own work and in contributing to conversations within the organization. Speaking of a pivotal moment he said, “this has been so interesting because it’s been these classes that have actually helped me to turn it back on.” He then concluded with this final statement which provides a summational argument for the work done in this study and for the broader field of positive organizational behavior. He said, “You know, these ideas from positive psychology really have *ignited things from the past* and that has given me *greater energy now, greater direction, and I see things completely different now.*” Such was the desired outcome and motivation for this study.

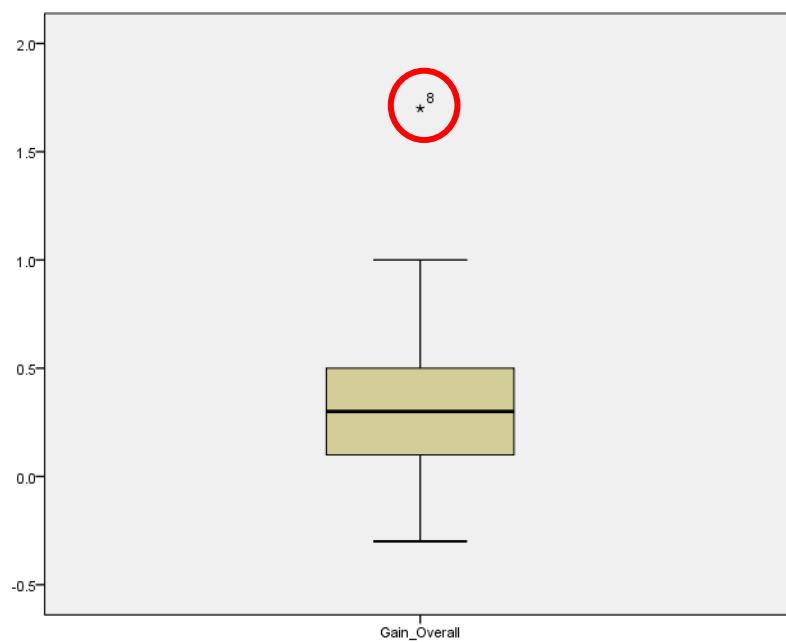


Figure 5.1 One Positive Outlier Found in the Data

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APPENDIX A

STUDY CONSENT FORM

Consent Document

BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you want to volunteer to take part in this study.

This study is focused on helping employees to develop greater psychological capital. We are asking you to take part because you expressed interest when we sent out the initial invitation via email. The study seeks to evaluate a work site training in determining its efficacy on influencing employee psychological capital. It will further explore the construct of psychological capital from a qualitative perspective in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of both what it is and what it looks like in an organization.

STUDY PROCEDURE

If you agree to be in this study you will be invited to complete a survey which will measure your current “psychological capital.” You will then attend three 2 hour trainings which will take place over a 6 week period of time. As part of this training you will have various tasks to complete during each week. At the conclusion of the 6 week training you will be asked to complete another survey which will again measure your psychological capital. Additionally, some of you may be asked to participate in an interview in an effort to better understand what helps individuals to develop this capital.

The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to audio record the interview.

RISKS

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

BENEFITS

While we hope that you will find value in the potential personal and professional development offered in this training, perhaps the most impactful benefit will be the awarding of a certification for your successful completion of the training. We have been authorized to offer one S&I certification credit for those who attend the three trainings and complete all associated assignments.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we record the interview, we will destroy the audio after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its recording.

PERSON TO CONTACT

The researcher conducting this study is Ryan Sharp. Please ask any questions you

have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Ryan Sharp at rsharp@ldschurch.org or at (801) 830-6973. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by email at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at participant.advocate@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS

There are no costs for participation and your awarding of a certification will have financial compensation implications.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX B

SAMPLES FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

QUESTIONNAIRE PCQ-24

PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ)

Below are statements that describe how you may think about yourself right now. Use the following scales to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree)

- 1. I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.
- 6. I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues.
- 8. At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals.
- 13. When I have a setback at work, I have trouble recovering from it, moving on.

(Reverse scoring)

- 19. When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

The four constructs of psychological capital are self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. I want to just ask a few questions from each of those constructs to try to better understand how you have personally developed PsyCap. Each question is going to be taken directly from questions asked on the PCQ-24 survey you took at the beginning and the end of our training experience. I would like you to try to consider and elaborate on the development process which led to the answers you gave on the survey.

Self-Efficacy

1. I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.
 - What has led to that confidence?
2. I feel confident contributing to discussions about the company's strategy.
 - For our purposes, obviously, the company is Seminaries and Institutes, so what's led you to have confidence in discussing the overall organizational strategy.
3. I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues.
 - By and large we're a pretty neurotic bunch and can sometimes be challenging students in terms of critiquing each other, or at least the perception of that. So what leaves you to feel confidence presenting information to a group of colleagues?

Hope

Hope in positive psychology is a little bit different than what we might think of as hope. Hope, in this sense, is sometimes described as the pathway towards accomplishing a goal. We often talk about willpower but some of the scholars discuss hope as "way-power." This is how I'm going to accomplish my goal.

4. If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.
 - What has led to that?
5. At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals.
6. Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work.
 - What evidence do you see that you are successful in your work?

Resilience

7. I usually manage difficulties one way or another at work.
8. I usually take stressful things at work in stride.
9. I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before.

- If you look at your career, have there been any kind of defining moments with that, as you look back those have set you on a particular course?

Optimism

10. When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best.

11. I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job.

12. I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains to work.

- Now looking forward, what leads you to be optimistic about the future?

APPENDIX D

INTERVENTION: SCHEDULE AND LESSONS

Date	Description
	Recruitment email sent by Area Director to 180 employees
May 30 th	1 st assignment sent via email (including a link for Pretest Survey)
June 7 th	Session 1 (Introduction; Self Efficacy; Meaningful Work)
June 8 th -20 th	Participants complete assignments and activities at home
June 21 st	Session 2 (Hope, optimism, positive psychology in practice)
June 22 nd -27 th	Participants complete assignments and activities at home
July 5 th	Session 3 (Resilience, Resiliency mapping)
July 6 th -12 th	Participants complete assignments and activities at home
July 18 th -23 rd	Email send with link to Posttest survey
September–October	Follow-up Interviews

Session 1

This first session provides an overview of the full training, introduces participants to the key concepts in Psychological Capital (PsyCap), provides training on Self-efficacy, and allows participants to learn about work as a calling and deeply meaningful work from one of the leading experts in the country.

Objectives

Participants in this session will:

- ✓ Understand the structure of the training
- ✓ Understand and be able to explain the four elements of PsyCap
- ✓ Understand the basic tenets of positive psychology and importance of strengths based development
- ✓ Be able to identify and explain which approach to developing self-efficacy is most productive for each of them.
- ✓ Gain understanding and insight into work as a calling

Teaching Points

- ❖ Introductions, overview of training schedule, expectations for them to receive certification credit
- ❖ Introduction to a career being “a profession or occupation chosen as one’s life’s work.”
- ❖ Introduction to Positive psychology
- ❖ Overview of Positive Organizational Behavior and explanation of the research surrounding PsyCap
- ❖ Exploration of strengths based personal development (learning activity to help participants understand and identify implications for their own growth)
- ❖ Developing Self-Efficacy (Performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, physiological). Discuss experiences with each of these four applications as a group and practice using specific scenarios from their respective work assignments.
- ❖ Guest speaker: Dr. Jeffrey Thompson
- ❖ Dismiss

Session 2

This session will help participants to understand the constructs of hope and optimism and ways to shape their own path in both personal and professional development.

Objectives

Participants in this session will:

- ✓ Review the principles emphasized in the previous training as well as some of the at home assignments
- ✓ Understand the construct of hope
- ✓ Understand and be able to articulate the six sources of influence
- ✓ Gain motivation and understanding that willpower can be learned and developed
- ✓ Gain greater insights into putting positive psychology into practice by a guest presenter

Teaching Points

- ❖ Define the construct of hope and concept of creating pathways to change behavior
 - Whiteboard video
- ❖ Is “will” a skill that can be developed
 - Group assignment to analyze a video/reading assignment.
 - Debrief with class
- ❖ Introduce and analyze the six sources of influence:
 - Personal motivation
 - Personal ability
 - Social motivation
 - Social ability
 - Structural motivation
 - Structural ability
- ❖ Tips on making change permanent
 - Introduce idea of directing the rider, motivating the elephant, and shaping the path
 - Small group activity to practice and find implications
- ❖ Guest speaker: Dr. Trish Henrie-Barrus
- ❖ Dismiss

Session 3

This session will help participants to understand the construct of resilience, will provide time for questions and discussions from the participant’s readings, and provide insight into the process of change.

Objectives

Participants in this session will:

- ✓ Review the concepts discussed regarding hope, optimism, and positive psychology in practice
- ✓ Understand resilience and the resiliency process
- ✓ Be able to identify the priority in their personal development that should require their best thinking and efforts
- ✓ Understand how to develop greater discipline in their change efforts to focus on those things that are essential

Teaching Points

- ❖ Define the construct of resilience
 - Briefly introduce the concept of resiliency mapping with assurance that Dr. Glenn Richardson (the day's guest speaker) would walk them through the process
- ❖ Essentialism in personal development
 - Whiteboard video
 - Self-reflection time
 - Debrief with class
- ❖ Extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus
 - Object lesson and small group project with toppling dominoes
 - Introduction to the Pareto principle and implications to their personal and professional development.
 - Personal application activity: develop a to do list and then refine that into a "success list"
- ❖ Guest Speaker: Resilience and resiliency mapping
- ❖ Dismiss

Written Assignments

Assignment #1 (Introduction and introspection; Complete Survey)

Assignment #2 (PsyCap article & BYU Devotional from Dr. Thompson and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #3 (Chapter from *Change Anything* and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #3 (Chapter from *Change Anything* and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #4 (Chapter from *Switch* and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #5 (2 weeks of “Morning Pages” and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #6 (Complete “Character Strengths” online assessment and 1-2 page reflection paper) <https://www.viacharacter.org/Survey/Account/Register>

Assignment #7 (*Of Teaching and Trusting* article and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #8 (Chapter from *The Happiness Advantage* and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #9 (Chapter from *Essentialism* and 1-2 page reflection paper)

Assignment #10 (2 page reflection on the overall experience and important insights and implications; Complete Survey)